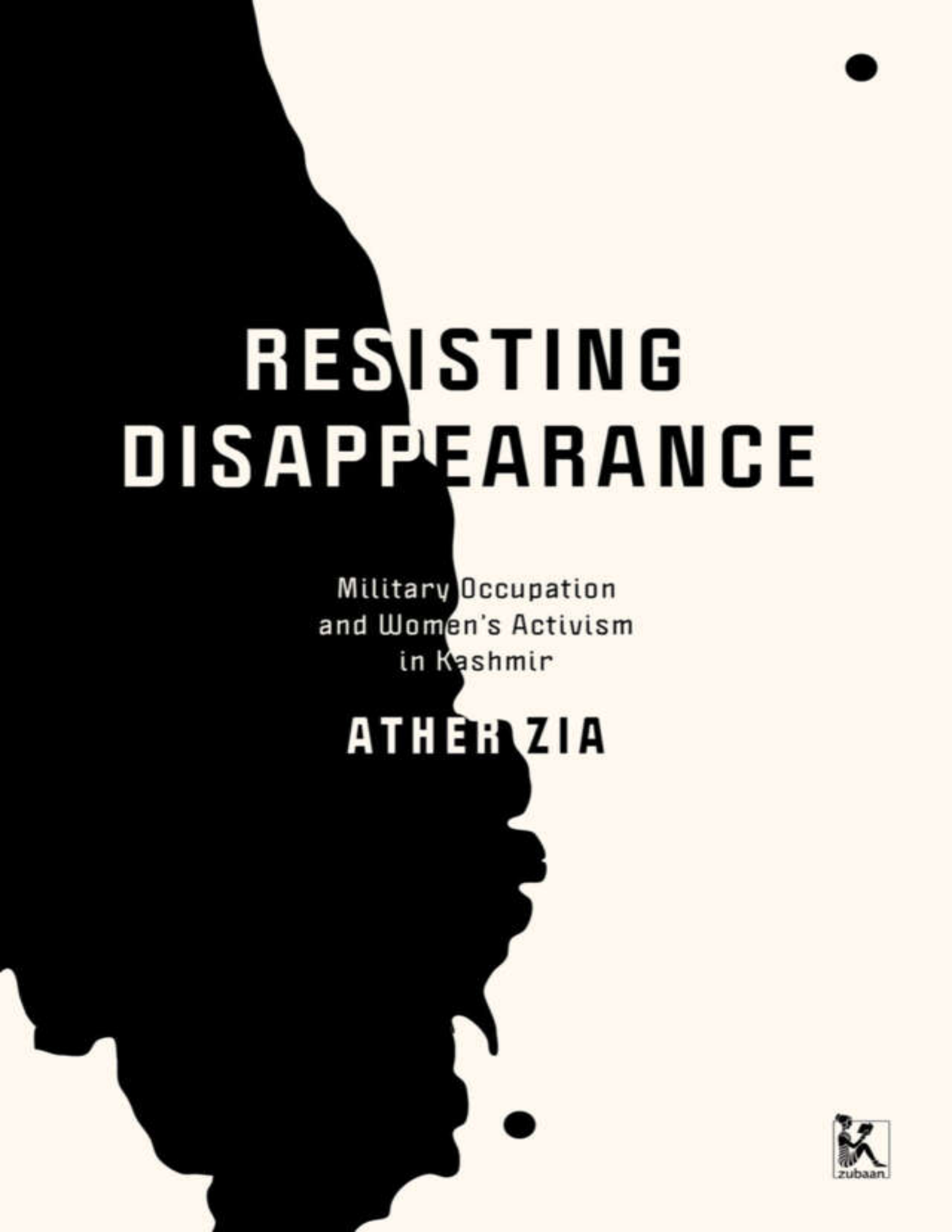




RESISTING DISAPPEARANCE

Military Occupation
and Women's Activism
in Kashmir

ATHER ZIA



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ZUBAAN

128-B Shahpur Jat

First Floor

New Delhi 110049

Email: zubaan@gmail.com

Website: www.zubaanbooks.com

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To my homeland, Kashmir, and its people, who make life possible under shadow of death

For Hussaina, whose last words continue to ring: “Kaem che karin [We have to continue the work].”

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFSPA	Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act
AJK	Azad Jammu and Kashmir
APDP	Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons
CASO	cordon-and-search operation
FIR	first information report
HM	Hizbul Mujahidin
JKCCS	Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society
JKLF	Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front
LoC	Line of Control
MUF	Muslim United Front
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
RR	Rashtriya Rifles
SHRC	State Human Rights Commission
SOG	Special Operations Group
STF	Special Task Force
UNCIP	United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan UNMOGIP United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan
VDC	village defense committees

[Publishers' note: The author has used a map of the region of Kashmir from 2019 by Bill Nelson, which cannot be included in this edition of the book.]

RESISTING DISAPPEARANCE



i, once lost you
in the bazaar
that no more opens
i will find you again,
i promise
only this time instead of sweets
we will get freedom

INTRODUCTION

Circa 1586, Kingdom of Kashmir

“Gah chyoum pewaan gatti, aki latti yeyam na? [You illuminate my dusk; will you return to me once more?]” During the fifteenth century, somewhere near the famed saffron fields in the valley of Kashmir, people would have heard this song of melancholy and longing in the mellifluous voice of Habbeh Khotoon. The Mughal emperor in Delhi had annexed Kashmir and duped Habbeh’s husband, King Yusuf Shah Chak, into imprisonment and exile, ending the rule of the last indigenous king in the region. Habbeh never gave up searching for her spouse.¹ Her struggle became manifest in the poetry she wrote decrying the social and political travails of the times in which she lived (Taing 1995). After the Mughal rule, Kashmir exchanged hands between many external conquerors—the Afghans, the Sikhs, the Dogras—and in 1947 it was bifurcated between India and Pakistan. This arrangement was temporary until a plebiscite under United Nations auspices was conducted to determine the political future of the Kashmiris.

At the heart of this book lies a search—a struggle similar to Habbeh’s—manifest in a group of Muslim Kashmiri women searching for their men (also Kashmiri and Muslim) who have been *forcibly disappeared* by Indian government forces in the part of Kashmir that is under Indian occupation.² Habbeh’s loss makes her the iconic first of many “half-widows” that exist in Kashmir today. In the early 1990s the contemporary term “half-widow” began to appear in the Kashmiri media to describe the wives of the men who had been disappeared by government forces. The word “disappeared” indicates a disappearance caused by the forces of the Indian government. The word “disappearance” operates as a verb in Kashmir—more specifically, it means “made to disappear” rather than simply to disappear or go missing. In the 1960s the phrase “enforced disappearances” first surfaced when it became a recognized tool of repression in Haiti, Brazil, and Guatemala, followed by Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, and Argentina. The

phrase in Spanish is *desaparecer a alguien* : “to cause (someone) to disappear.” Subsequently, in the Latin American usage, “disappeared” became code for arrest, deportation, and torture in secret prisons and dumping of dead bodies (see Vranckx 2007). In Kashmir the local term used is *gaeb kermi* , which roughly means “those who have been disappeared,” and the English word “disappeared” has become common.

But why are Kashmiri men disappeared by the Indian government forces? Since the 1990s, enforced disappearances became part of a tacitly approved repertoire of punishments used to suppress the Tehreek, the popular name for the resistance movement against Indian rule. So far, between eight thousand and ten thousand Kashmiri men, both combatants and noncombatants, have been disappeared by the Indian government forces (Duschinski et al. 2018; Mathur 2016; C. K. Mahmood 2000). In 1989 the resistance to Indian rule that had begun in 1947 itself took the shape of a popular armed struggle. By this time Kashmir had entered into a “terminal colonial situation” (Lamb 1991: 322) within India. The Kashmiri Tehreek has “many political and ideological features of classic twentieth century anticolonial movements” (Kaul 2017: 178). The Indian government asserts its authority through visible and brute military might to curb demands for Haq-e-khodayariyat (self-determination under UN auspices) and Tehreek (the campaign for independence). Currently, 650,000-strong Indian troops exist in the region of about 12.5 million people, with one Indian soldier for every nineteen Kashmiris.

The region’s militarized administration provides a backdrop to the everyday lives and human rights violations of the Kashmiris. The government in Kashmir functions with support from two serving military corps commanders as security advisers: “Thus the same agency[,] namely the army which is carrying out the operations in Kashmir, is in fact the highest decision making authority . . . the civil government is tantamount to proxy military rule” (Public Commission on Human Rights, Kashmir 2007). In 1990 the Indian government imposed the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and the Jammu and Kashmir Disturbed Areas Act. AFSPA gives the Indian armed and paramilitary

forces sweeping powers that facilitate arbitrary arrest and detention, custodial and extrajudicial executions, torture, rape, and otherwise cruel, inhumane, degrading treatment, and it reinforces the impunity of offenders acting under it, including the authority to shoot to kill (Amnesty International 1999; Human Rights Watch 2006; OHCHR 2018).

MAKING THE DISAPPEARED “APPEAR”

Circa 2011, Central Srinagar

Songs of longing and loss pierced the afternoon of December 10 in a public park in the heart of the capital city of Srinagar. I heard Habbah Khatoon’s verses in the guttural laments arising around me. A weak sun shone on the naked Chinar trees under which the activists from the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) sat for their monthly protest. They were also observing the International Day of Human Rights. The APDP initially organized informally as a network of parents, relatives, and other concerned people dedicated to searching for disappeared Kashmiri men. In 1994, Parveena Ahangar, whose seventeen-year-old son had been arrested and then disappeared while in the custody of the Indian forces, and Parvez Imroz, a human rights lawyer and activist, formally founded the organization.³ The APDP is led by women, most of whom are mothers, half-widows, and sisters, although the association also includes brothers, fathers, and other kinsmen as members. APDP activists mobilize demonstrations, pursue court cases, collect documentation, seek audiences with army or government officials, and scour prisons and morgues in search of the disappeared. The highlight of the APDP movement is a monthly sit-in, which has become a ritualistic public mourning, marked alternately by funereal silence and lamentation for the disappeared men.

In the Kashmiri tradition the rituals of mourning are gendered. Men mourn in a discreet manner, arranging funerals and convening prayer meetings. While women expressly take part in lamenting and singing dirges, the event of mourning is physically limited to the four walls of the

home. But after 1989, faced with the killings, disappearances, and arrests of both combatants and noncombatants, many Kashmiri women abandoned their traditionally decorous behaviors. They began to take part in public protests and demonstrations against human rights violations carried out by Indian troops. To find the disappeared men, previously homebound Kashmiri women entered courts, military camps, police stations, and morgues—places heretofore seen as masculine domains where they would not venture alone. The APDP activists are primarily Muslims, often from economically marginalized rural classes and not formally educated.⁴

For many of these women, the disappeared men appear to have been the family's main breadwinners (Choudhury and Moser-Puangsuwan 2007; Mathur 2016). The victims of enforced disappearances include businessmen, lawyers, laborers, farmers, government workers, and students—in other words, “ordinary civilians having no connections with armed opposition groups operative in Jammu and Kashmir” (Amnesty International 1999: 10). As Parveena Ahangar explained: “Kashmiri women came out crying on the streets, to mourn loved ones, abandoning the sheltered lives we led. When my son was disappeared, I threw down my burkha; if not for us women, who was there to look for our boys and men? We had to lead from the front because they [the Indian forces] made men the primary targets of their bullets.”⁵

At a quick glance, the APDP activists sitting together that day resembled a family funeral. Only the gathering was public, with passersby watching and media thronging the site. The activists chanted slogans, sang eulogies, and lamented their loss, surrounded by signage decrying the enforced disappearances, demanding justice and accountability from the government. Their slogan reverberated through the air: “Ye tamasha nahi hai, ye matam sahi hai [This is not a spectacle/performance; this is real/true mourning].” The crowd continued to swell, and a smattering of men joined the protest. A police vehicle blocked the park entrance. About eight or ten men from the local police force patrolled the scene.

Eighty-year-old activist Zooneh held a sign: “Where is our beloved Syed Ahmed? Bring the criminals to justice.”⁶ Her son, Syed, a house

painter, had been disappeared in 2001. Close to Zooneh sat her daughter-in-law, Babli, and her granddaughter, Lali. Babli, who was about thirty years old, gazed at the picture of Syed. She held a sign that read: “Half-widow: waiting for my husband.” The shy Lali, who was only a few months old when her father was disappeared, held a sign as well: “Where is my Father?” All the activists wore white headbands displaying a featureless profile representing the disappeared men. Little Lali wore the white band on her hair like a tiara perched atop her head. She was not pretending to be in a fairytale, however; she was living the nightmare of enforced disappearances. After the demonstration, the activists returned their headbands to the APDP office, but Lali asked permission to retain one. She kept it along with her meager possessions, only to be taken out for this monthly act. The APDP protest had become a way of life for her—a ritual, a commitment passed down from her foremothers. Lali’s grandmother explained that their activism kept Lali’s father alive.

The protest scene grew more active. Media reporters interviewed the activists. Photojournalists swarmed around the group, looking for better angles and directing the women to move into better light. The activists acquiesced, inconvenienced by being made to move around in the cold and having to sit on the hard, frozen ground. One activist, alluding to the group’s long struggle, said to another: “Ye oreh-yoaer aes parey, nateh chu kamey gudryomuth [This (moving from spot to spot for the photos) was still remaining; as if our tragedy is not enough]. Magar kya karow [But it must be done].” A new member sat weeping with her son’s photograph facedown in her lap. Zooneh placed a hand on her shoulder. “Beni [Sister],” she said, “hold his picture high; he must be seen. That is what we are here for.” Zooneh’s directive is at the heart of the individual and collective mission of the APDP activists: to make seen that which has been forcibly disappeared.

As the activists protested, lamented, eulogized, gave interviews to media, and posed for countless photographs—often thirsty and hungry from traveling from the remote parts of the region of Kashmir—these mothers, wives, and other kin presented themselves to make the disappeared men

appear: to make visible what had been made invisible by the government. An analogous image that comes to mind is the chalk outline of a body at a crime scene. Like the chalk outline of that which has been annihilated, the APDP activists provide their own bodies in public as a stark symbol to manifest the disappeared. Each activist collectively and individually embodies a spectacular politics of mourning, which has made the APDP movement a visible political discourse of resistance to the Indian military occupation.

The work of the APDP has not been without danger. In Kashmir dissent is criminalized, and public demonstrations for demanding political and human rights have often proven fatal. Since 1989, the government has routinely prohibited public congregations in Kashmir. The right to free speech, to be free from unlawful detention, or to have a free trial remains suspended. The Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act (1978), the Jammu and Kashmir Criminal Law Amendment Act (1983), the 1987 Terrorism and Disruptive Act (active in Kashmir until 1995), coupled with the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, prevent the right to political affiliation and opinion, the right to freedom of speech, and the right to life (Kazi 2009; Bhan 2013; see also Sangathana 1995). In the initial years, the APDP activists faced threats and harassment from the government forces. Haleema Begum, a pioneer activist whose son Bilal Ahmed had been disappeared, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in September 1998 along with her other son. Haleema's story was an important testimony in an Amnesty International report (1999) on disappearances in Kashmir. Ironically, while the report begins with her witness, it also carries the news of her killing. Some local observers have linked Haleema's assassination, which remains unsolved, to her activism (2000b: 1787). Indian jurist A. J. Noorani (2000b: 1787) clearly states: "Her crime? Efforts to save her son."

As the government intensified the counterinsurgency policies throughout the 1990s, human rights violations increased. Women heavily participated in public demonstrations against these atrocities, and the APDP was formalized during these years with the women at the forefront. The

movement of the APDP in Kashmir in many ways resembles that of Madres de Plaza Mayo (Mothers of the Plaza Mayo) in Argentina. The Madres are legendary Argentinian activists, mothers whose children were “disappeared” during the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983 (known as the Dirty War). Like the Madres, the APDP activists individually and collectively persist in searching for the disappeared and thus create and sustain awareness of the issue.

The focus of this ethnography is the APDP activists whose activism emerges from the work of mourning, which in itself becomes a mode of affective politics countering India’s military occupation in Kashmir. My analysis illustrates the ways in which these activists become hypervisible in public and how they emerge as agents of change who alter social constructions relating to normative conceptions of body, sexuality, gender, justice, human rights, and political rights. The APDP activists are mobilized primarily by female consciousness, in an urgent response to the destruction of their communities caused by political violence. Temma Kaplan (1982: 545) has described female consciousness as that which “centers upon the rights of gender, on social concerns, on survival.” She argues that female consciousness leading to public mobilization becomes an entryway into political consciousness and ultimately feminist consciousness.

This ethnography, deliberately, is not calibrated around gender and gender dynamics in the context of what Julie Peteet (1991: 6) has called “oppositional poles of liberation and subordination”; instead, it focuses on daily transformations and what might emerge as gradual emancipatory processes instigated by a protracted war, where “everyday life has become a political process” (T. Kaplan 1982: 565). In the lives of the APDP activists, agency appears more nuanced than merely being openly confrontational; rather, it is attuned to the cultural demands made on gendered behaviors. As Saba Mahmood (2001: 203) puts it in the context of Muslim women in the Egyptian mosque movement, agency appears “not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create.” The APDP activists thus become agentive by working with the social as well as

political constraints on their gendered roles in order to foster their activism. The theoretical heart of APDP's mission beats with what in Foucauldian genealogy is called countermemory (Foucault 1991). These are the practices of remembering and forgetting that become crucial for resisting oppression and oppressive dominant ideologies.

These countermemories are “subjugated knowledges,” which Michel Foucault defines as narratives in different forms produced by marginalized people, often hidden behind dominant statist versions. Such knowledges—often seen as naïve, informal, and inferior—are produced by the APDP as a collective as well as by individual activists. These narratives combat *the government's official versions, which deny any role in the enforced disappearances*. The subjugated knowledges appear in both archival and performative modes, in documentation and through public mourning. In this way the APDP's activism becomes a resistant memory against amnesia forced by a repressive regime. The work of APDP activists highlights their subjugated knowledges, which exposes the Indian governments' policies to control Kashmiri dissent.

The search for the disappeared in Kashmir has been ongoing concertedly since 1994, and so far not a single disappeared person has been found. The government stages the disappearances to threaten the “potentially guilty” into submission, spreading intimidation and fear by building invisibility and deniability into this technique of punishment. A single disappeared body becomes a symbol of the panopticon—that is, a spectral threat of similar annihilation aimed at regulating the political behavior of Kashmiris. Enforced disappearances become a means for staging and implementing the Indian military's hold over Kashmir. This book follows the footsteps of a growing critical body of scholarship that understands Kashmir in the context of the Indo-Pak partition, India's military and legal annexation, bifurcation, UN intervention, and the continuing Kashmiri demand for sovereignty and self-determination.⁷

The Indian military occupation manifests as foundational violence (Cocks 2012), which as a paradigm helps contextualize all forms of violence—direct, structural, and cultural as illustrated by Johann Galtung

(1975, 1978, 1980). The foundational violence imposed by India in Kashmir is singularly focused on absorbing it as another state in its federation.⁸ Although foundational violence is destructive, Joan Cocks (2012: 103) asserts that it is also exerted through practices that are conventionally considered nonviolent or productive, are not just exploitative but obliterate social relations, and not only “merely distort reality but annihilate the meanings permeating a preexisting reality.” In the context of Kashmir I examine electoral democracy (chapter 2) and military humanitarianism (chapter 5) as facets of foundational violence, both of which are deployed by the Indian government to bolster the military occupation.

THE STATE OF MILITARY OCCUPATION

The Indian government maintains the use of extreme force inside Kashmir as a necessary policy to hold on to the territory it describes as an *atoot ang* (“inseparable part”). This oft-repeated phrase is used to reinforce the government’s territorial claim on the entire region of Kashmir, including the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (the part under Pakistan’s control) and the no-man’s-land that is occupied by China. The entire region of Kashmir, which takes up about 332,413 square kilometers, appears as a hypervisible “psychic border” in the Indian nationalist imagination and strategy of nation making. The Indian government routinely asserts its symbolic authority “through a habitualized performativity” (Aggarwal 2004: 17). I use the term “border” solely to make manifest the hypersurveillance in the region since no internationally recognized border exists between India and Pakistan in the region of Kashmir. The nonexistence of an international border and the presence of the Line of Control (LoC)—originally a UN-brokered ceasefire line (also called Asia’s Berlin Wall between the two parts of Kashmir)—are symbolic of contestations that harken back to the region’s unified status prior to 1947 and the explicit tripartite nature of the dispute (Robinson 2013).

This is in contrast to Indian and most international political analyses that subsume Kashmiris and their aspirations under explanations of a territorial dispute that is solely between India and Pakistan. Characterizing the Kashmir region as a psychic border makes explicit the state of siege that exists in Kashmir, where the Indian government is constantly staging and strengthening its strategies of control and domination. The besieged atmosphere in Kashmir of an imposing military occupation fosters fear, human suffering, and complicated ways of survival that are unique to living under a regime primarily geared toward counterinsurgency. Across the valley this is manifest in prisons, army camps, checkpoints, bunkers, interrogation centers, and surveillance towers that have become part of the “normal” landscape. The Indian troops occupy 250,000 acres of state land (Navlakha 2009). At the time of this writing, paramilitary forces are working on establishing more permanent installations. Kashmiris perceive these as sites where the might of the Indian nation is staged countless times daily: “Bas hez Hindustan hawan taqat Kashiren [Bottom line, India is showing us its might],” a local grocery store owner said to me. In old downtown Kashmir his shop has sat neck-to-neck with a bunker since 1990. “Yemou chesmou wutch kya kya! [My eyes have seen much],” the store owner said, alluding to the daily sufferings under militarization. Kashmir has thus become “an everyday prison for the people of the valley” (Duschinski 2009: 709).

At any given time, the entire Kashmiri population is under threat of being stopped, detained, beaten, humiliated, stripped, and interrogated (Human Rights Watch 1991). Punishments in both public spaces and private homes have become lessons in Indian authority for Kashmiris. Immense violence is exacted on combatants and civilians alike (OCHCR 2018). Over the years large cordon-and-search operations (CASOs) have become part and parcel of daily life. These crackdowns involve government troops conducting combing operations and have resulted in mass detentions (Peer 2010: 49). Reintroduced in 2017, CASOs ambush militants in civilian areas. The troops use explosives to destroy homes where the militants are hiding. The judiciary and the administration do not consider such violations in

Kashmir as falling within the purview of international humanitarian law, such as the Geneva Conventions (1949), the Additional Protocols (1977), or international criminal law. As for the crime of enforced involuntary disappearances, it is not codified as a distinct offense in Indian penal law (see Amnesty International 1993, 1998, 2002, 2005). India signed the International Convention against Enforced Disappearances in February 2007 but did not ratify the convention.

The troops in Kashmir come from the army, paramilitary, and different formal units of the Indian national forces, which at 1.1 million soldiers is the second largest national force in the world. The 650,000 Indian military and paramilitary personnel currently stationed in the region represent a significant portion of India's defense budget. The Indian armed troops also have trained auxiliary forces that include Kashmiri militants who surrendered their arms as well as small-time criminals and thugs. In 1994 the government created the Special Operations Group (SOG), which worked closely with the Rashtriya Rifles (RR), another auxiliary force formed to fight the insurgency in Kashmir. The Jammu and Kashmir Police created the Special Task Force (STF) militia group in 1995 (Public Commission on Human Rights [J&K] and People's Union for Democratic Rights [Delhi] 2007). Another dreaded vigilante militia called the Ikhwanees (also called Nab-yid, surrendered or government militants) emerged as well. The government also armed civilian vigilante groups, especially in Jammu province, called village defense committees (VDCs).

These militia groups, specifically the Ikhwanees, did not wear any uniform and behaved like warlords. A Human Rights Watch (1996: 1) report observed: "Indian forces have in effect subcontracted some of their abusive tactics to groups with no official accountability." The militia took part in joint patrols with the regular armed troops and became notorious for extrajudicial murders, extortion, rapes, kidnappings, and disappearances. The acronyms of these various agencies—the SOG, the RR, the STF, and VDCs—have become synonymous with state terrorism. The human rights violations increased exponentially as the impunity of these groups translated into out-of-turn promotions for officers and cash rewards for

participating in operations, recovering arms or ammunition, or killing militants. In 2004, under the government of India's policy of turning rebels into stake-holders, the SOG and the STF were disbanded and absorbed into the regular armed forces (Katoch 2013). In addition to these forces, there are about 134,000 state policemen, primarily drawn from communities across Jammu and Kashmir. Increasingly since 2008 the local police has been militarized and pushed into the forefront of the counterinsurgency, which has given rise to the specter of internecine warfare.

GENDER AND RESISTANCE IN KASHMIR: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Although historically there have been formidable female figures in this region, the status of Kashmiri women in society from the fifteenth century on began to decline (Bazaz 1959). After external invaders conquered Kashmir, local women became victims of routine looting, rape, forced marriage, and sex trafficking. From the sixteenth century on, Kashmiri society was pushed into near-slavery. From 1846, as the Hindu Dogra monarchy took over, the status of Kashmiris, mostly Muslims, suffered a new low, being politically isolated, illiterate, and barely surviving under high taxes. Prostitution and child sex trafficking was legal and taxed (Brinckman 1973; Thorp 1980 [1870]; I. Khan 1999). In the early twentieth century, the Kashmiri masses began organizing to fight the monarchy, and women took an active part in this resistance. By the time the resistance ended in the late 1940s, many female activists had retired into private life (I. Khan 1999; K. Misri 2002; S. Malik 2014). This echoes what feminist scholars have revealed in studies on national liberation movements across the globe, that such movements in general provide space for women to be active, but they are expected to return to conventional domesticity once the struggle is over (De Mel 2003; Bernal 2000, 2001; Sharoni 2001; Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Campling 1989).

The subject of the sociopolitical conditions in Kashmir before and in the immediate aftermath of 1947, and their impact on women, merits a separate

chapter. However, here I offer a concise background. Kashmiri working-class women were not prone to strict purdah (veiling) like upper-class women from the elite or clergy classes who could afford nonvisible lifestyles (see Mufti 1994). The common gender dynamic in Kashmir was predicated on complementary spheres of influence, which emerged from a patriarchal structure. The men dominated public life, and the women were influential in the private sphere. The socioeconomic roles of men and women were predetermined by what I call “working-class patriarchy.” Within the trader and artisan classes, a complementary economic relationship between men and women existed while plying their family trade. For example, if men caught the fish, women sold the fish; if men baked, women sold the bread; and if men farmed, women sold the produce. Other women worked mostly as pashmina-yarn or silk spinners, embroiderers, and midwives. The centrality of Kashmiri women in public life can be found in classical literature and folklore that engages with the themes of the beauty, industriousness, and wit of tradeswomen. Some Kashmiri poems exemplifying this are “Grees Koor” (Peasant girl) by Gulam Ahmed Mahjoor, Fazil Kashmiri’s “Kraal Koor” (Potter’s lass), “Doeb Bai” (Washerwoman), “Pahyell Koor” (A shepherd’s daughter), and Dina Nath Nadim’s “Dal Haanzni Hyund Vatsun” (Song of the boatwoman). In the countryside, women were viewed as dependable partners in cultivating rice, tending farms and orchards, and raising cattle and other livestock.

After the Indo-Pak partition and the burgeoning political strife in Kashmir, quite a few women were visible on the political firmament, mostly because of their family affiliation (K. Misri 2002; N. A. Khan 2014). Toward the late 1980s, after the armed struggle began and the government cracked down on the population, women’s public activism became crucial for social survival. Women came out in droves, seeking to secure the release of men who had been arrested or searching for those who had been disappeared. Women’s public activism was gradually institutionalized through such groups as APDP and iconized in figures like Parveena Ahangar and other APDP demonstrators. Political activists like Zamrooda

Habib of the Muslim Khawateen Markaz (the Center for Muslim Women), Asiya Andrabi of Dukhtaran-e-Millat (Daughters of the Nation), and Farida Dar (Jammu Kashmir Mass Movement) have become well-respected figures in society, even though they remain marginal in the male-dominated resistance movement.

The narrative of the Indian government and media has always presented Kashmiri women as hapless victims of the male-dominated resistance movement, as stereotypically oppressed, dependent, passive, and without agency (Ray 2005; Swami 2007). Some feminist scholars have focused on presenting a more nuanced analysis of Kashmiri women's experiences and agency. Seema Kazi (2009) has asserted that the struggle for Kashmir's self-determination and *azadi* (freedom) centers on the politicized roles of mothers, wives, and sisters as well as the complexities of a besieged patriarchy under militarization. Rita Manchanda (2001) has focused on the agency of Kashmiri women as they face the double burdens of becoming the sole providers and seeking justice for their men who might be dead, disappeared, wounded, or in jail, thus ensuring the survival of the community. Shubh Mathur's ethnography (2016) examines the system of de jure and de facto impunity under a military occupation and how activists like Parveena Ahangar and the APDP rally against it. Analyzing the group as a mode of cultural production, Deepti Misri in her book *Beyond Partition* (2014) concludes how the APDP as a movement keeps the memory of the disappeared alive and poses a challenge to Indian rule.

Freny Manecksha has evocatively illustrated the evolution of Kashmiri women's agency and resistance in her 2016 book *Behold, I Shine*, which takes its title from Habbeh Khotoon's poem. Manecksha argues that the identities and roles of Kashmiri women are complex and therefore cannot be neatly boxed into categories of agentive or passive. She foregrounds how Kashmiri women have asserted their identities to propagate the ideal of *azadi* and resistance and how they are not just caught in the political violence but resist in conscious ways. Inshah Malik (2015, 2019), a Kashmiri scholar taking on the question of agency, has illustrated how the Kashmiri women in the resistance movement have crafted their notions of

self and ideals of a just and free political community in religious-cultural terms to fit the requirements of the Tehreek.

Asiya Jeelani, an early pioneer of gendered political activism, was a committed human rights defender and edited a magazine, called *The Voices*, devoted to women's issues under militarization. Jeelani's activism was cut short by her untimely death in a mine blast in 2004 while she was monitoring elections. In 2014, in a milestone development, a group of fifty young Kashmiri women came together to file public interest litigation under the banner of the Support Group for Kunan Poshpora. The group seeks a thorough reinvestigation of a case where the Indian army raped more than fifty Kashmiri women and tortured men on the intervening night of February 23–24, 1991. Five activists from the group have coauthored an important book on the case, which has become symbolic of the systematic and widespread use of sexual violence—a crime of war against the people of Kashmir, as Human Rights Watch (1993b) has termed it. Nitasha Kaul and I (Kaul and Zia 2018: 34) have described an aspect of Kashmiri women's agency in the resistance: “In the powerful idiom of postcolonial criticality, the question is not: Can the Kashmiri women speak?, but rather: Can you hear them?”

DOING ETHNOGRAPHY IN KASHMIR

Every academic discipline has an array of terms to identify their research community. Anthropology has a long tradition of terming its sources as collaborators, interlocutors, informants, consultants, friends, acquaintances, or intimates. These terms are used in an effort to be fair to the “human-as-research-instrument aspect of ethnography” (Modan 2016). Yet, for my Kashmiri research community, I was in a dilemma about how to refer to them in this ethnography. My issue did not come from a theoretical praxis-oriented shift in critical anthropology; rather, it had more to do with the political and social realities of the “English” words, especially those routinely used, specifically “collaborator,” “interlocutor,” and “informant.” In Kashmir these words are burdened with politics. Words, as Julie Peteet

(2005: 153) has written, are “intervention” and subject to historical process. I take this opportunity to explain these terms as a form of political analysis and also to foreshadow the complexity and layeredness of Indian military occupation, which complicates Kashmiri subjectivities. These words have become akin to cuss words referring to people perceived as traitors to the Tehreek.

Naming My Research Partners

The word “collaborator” denotes a person who has been appropriated by the Indian government and the counterinsurgency apparatus (discussed further in chapter 5) and is willingly or unwillingly aiding and abetting Indian rule. A rising debate among Kashmiri scholars and activists is whether the native administrators and bureaucrats who act on behalf of the Indian government can be categorized as collaborators of the military occupation. This debate is an indicator of how Kashmiris perceive their relation with India. The word “informant” (*mukhbir* in local terminology) is used for a person who passes information to the counterinsurgency apparatus. It primarily refers to a low-level source planted in communities who directly reports to the counterinsurgency grid. As for “interlocutor,” interestingly this word was first used in the 1940s and 1950s for the UN mediators appointed for Kashmir. The Indian government nowadays uses the term to describe high-level Indian negotiators appointed to gauge the situation or to hold talks with select opinion leaders in Kashmir. Thus “interlocutors” have become part of the Indian politics that Kashmiri consider as reducing the Tehreek varyingly to a law-and-order situation or Pakistan’s proxy war, or the so-called religious terrorism, rather than an international dispute that needs a political solution.

Given this backdrop, the three most frequently used words in Western ethnography are all laden with what most of the Kashmiri population views as the “unethical enterprise” of aiding and abetting Indian rule. Hence I refrain from using them to refer to my research community. I also do not use the word “respondent,” which is inadequate since the contributions of

my research community constantly shifted my analysis. In this ethnography I therefore call them “research partners” or “community,” depending on when I want to emphasize our research relation; or I simply use their preferred names or pseudonyms; or, wherever suitable, I designate them as activists.

Anthropologist at Home

Since 1998, I had been interacting with the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons in different capacities while living in Kashmir—as a student, a journalist, a civil servant, and, last but not least, as an activist. After coming to the United States to pursue further education, I began working formally with the APDP in 2008. I was naïvely readying myself to divest much of what I already knew, felt, and held in my bones, like any other Kashmiri growing up amid political violence. I tried to keep my intimate knowledge of violence, trauma, loss, and survival at arm’s length, lest I taint my scholarly methods and objectives. As academic research demands, I consciously tried to steep myself in the ethos of being what Victoria Sanford and Asale Angel-Ajani (2006) call a fearless spectator and a disengaged observer. These were increasingly difficult positions to assume, as my research community at the APDP embraced me in the same manner as they had in the past, when they were not the focus of any research. In addition, now that I was older, and a spouse and mother, they extended a sisterhood, friendship, and camaraderie to match my newly acquired roles. I was explicit in conveying to them the nature of my new project.

“So, what is it that you will do with ‘walking’ with us? What will you ‘make’?” This was the general type of question that Parveena Ahangar and other activists initially asked about my work—not that I was the only one working with them in the capacity of a researcher. As they were more accustomed to being the subjects of journalistic interviews for print and electronic media, they took some time to comprehend my long stay. Parveena Ahangar often encouragingly nodded when I introduced my work

to anyone in her presence, saying, “Fatah, fatah [victory, victory].” When I explained my goals to other activists—some of whom were known and some of whom were getting to know me—no one treated me any differently after learning that my work would result in the production of essays, a book, and talks. Most of the activists recognized “kath paki brunh [the word about disappearances will be amplified].”

Almost everyone I talked to made a supplication of “victory” for my project and the highest *kursi* (chair). A chair as a universal symbol of authority was a supplication for gaining authority to further the cause. It was obvious that the women thought of my work as an extension and amplification of their activism, only in a different realm. Parveena Ahangar often said: “Tchyen kaem che aseh zorath. Soan doad te gam chu takaar; tche checkh aseh gawah [We need your work. Our pain and grief are glaring (in the face of others); you are our witness].” In ethnography the act of witnessing violence, as Veena Das (2007) has explained, is not just about objectivity but also about seeking the subject through the experience. Thus an anthropologist differs from an eyewitness, as the authority of the former rests on science and disinterestedness and appeals to secular or legal authority. The ethnographer, however, does the *witnessing*, and the ethnography (the archive) becomes the *witness*. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) has also emphasized participant observation as witnessing, which has a way of drawing ethnographers into spaces of human life that they might refrain from entering otherwise; the epitome of such participant observation is achieved through writing. It is not just being a witness but the act of witnessing in the field that can make a truthful observer, as numerous scholars have articulated (Daniel 1996; Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997; Robben and Soares-Orozco 2000; Greenhouse, Mertz, and Warren 2002; Taussig 2003; Das 2007).

Whenever the APDP activists introduced me to someone, they reinforced my status by saying, “Ye che saney kaem karaan.” This loosely translates to: “She is bolstering the work we do.” This form of introduction established a link between the APDP activists and my work, invoking an intimacy that manifested as me being called a “de-facto member, friend,

[closer than] a daughter, mother.” This ready acceptance from the APDP activists intensified and broadened the scope of my observations and participation. I was deeply interwoven in the group’s organizational day-to-day events. I involved myself in informal family events, conversations, and even the running of emergency errands. Sometimes I fulfilled the role of counselor; at other times I was the one consoled. Mostly I was a trustworthy figure who became a steady presence.

As such, this book can be called an “intimate ethnography” (Walley 2013: 14)—not that my research community is my biological family, but they are “family-like.” In Kashmir the legend goes that when people exchange information about their lineage, everyone is able to find a few relatives in common. As an always-present ethnographer, my research community began to treat me as though I belonged to “both an individual and cultural category” (Okely 1992: 24). The APDP activists primarily come from marginalized classes and castes, and the two tend to overlap. The differences between my privileged professional and family background and my research partners were stark at an individual level. Yet as part of a group, I was accepted wholeheartedly into the affective community, and we bonded over a culture of shared loss and grief. The contemporary world of anthropological research is mired in human rights violations, death, and sickness. Scheper-Hughes (1993: 23) has written about the impossibility of neutrality and the ethnographer being “an invisible and permeable screen through which pure data, ‘facts,’ could be objectively filtered and recorded.” In an ethnography of political violence, Kimberly Theidon (2013: 20) has explained it this way: “In matters where we ask people about life, death, and pain, we either acknowledge it or avoid it—and in either case, the possibility of distance and impartiality must be surrendered.”

As I progressed in my fieldwork, I increasingly understood the call of being “disengaged” or maintaining “neutrality” as an observer, not as divesting anything (either emotional or professional) that had for years as a Kashmiri kept me “engaged” with the APDP in the first place. The disengagement was not about “distancing” myself from the field or being hyperwary of my being a Kashmiri; rather, it was a diagnostic for what I

carried as the social and political being I am and how it could shape my analysis. Since there is great emphasis on being a “participant” and an “observer” in anthropological methods, it is telling of the participatory logic of the give-and-take that we need to have with the field. For me, the disengagement was thus about removing myself while being embedded as an anthropologist—just like one catches tea leaves (self) in a sieve while pouring the tea (observations) into a cup. It is obvious that without the leaves there would be no tea, but the technique lies in catching them so as not to burden the flavor of the tea.

As feminist anthropology has taught us, reflexivity and the confessional power of revealing one’s method are critical components of doing ethnography (Silverstein and Lewin 2016). This has always been a means to control and monitor the subjectivity of the ethnographer, who exists as both a participant and an observer (Kaplan 2002). The ideal of reflexivity is incredibly meaningful to any analysis and representation—including mine. In this context the complexity of the plurality and ambiguity of intersubjective life as well as the question of the limitations and boundaries of ethnography manifest in how we as ethnographers can see most clearly (Jackson 2013). The path of a detailed ethnography with a singular commitment to empiricism appeared as a link between *vita active* and *vita contemplative*—the balance between the intimate/immediate and remote/abstract life-worlds (ibid.: xiii)—and determinative of how anthropology would best serve the ethical call of documenting the field of research.

THE TROUBLE WITH ETHNOGRAPHY

Although I know the power of ethnography, I also recognize its troubled history of developing in an ethos that initially was geared to propagate the Western colonial project. Of consequence is the fact that the political dispute regarding Kashmir is the bane and a remnant of the colonial legacy in which the history of early ethnography is deeply implicated. The European missionaries, colonial administrators, and travelers, who doubled

as ethnologists and ethnographers, have produced numerous detailed, sometimes well-meaning but also questionable works on Kashmir and its “natives.” The colonial imagination has presented the Kashmiri Orient as abounding with scenes of colonial idyll, wilderness, and romance. This imagery was fine-tuned through poems like “Lalla Rookh: An Oriental Romance,” written in 1817 by the Irish poet Thomas Moore. The early biases of Eurocentric ethnography against indigenous peoples are manifest even in the eminent works of such famed names as Auriel Stein, Walter Lawrence, Arthur Brickman, William Digby, William Moorcroft, and Francis Younghusband.

While the colonial travelers eulogized Kashmir’s rejuvenating natural beauty, leisure-inspiring environs, and deep solitude, the natives—mostly poor and broken under successive tyrannical rules—were amply admonished for their primitiveness and general aura of servitude. Photographs from bygone eras are replete with soft, verdant valleys; majestic peaks capped with snow; whitewater rivers forcefully rushing down the mountains; wild flowers; and gazelles and gentle lambs. An odd native or two may be seen lurking, but often they are shown in service to the *angrez sahibs* —an honorific title for Englishmen. Some analyses masquerade as speaking for Kashmiris’ suffering while pushing the agenda of a complete takeover by the British Crown. A common thread running through the accounts is the figure of the native Kashmiri, full of cowardice, laziness, dishonesty, and greed.⁹

Cecile Earnest Tyndale-Biscoe, a missionary who is highly regarded in Kashmir for starting one of the earliest modern educational institutions, wrote that the term “Kashmiri” represents being “a coward and a rogue and much else of unpleasant nature” (1922 [1870]: 78). Tyndale-Biscoe’s mission to “civilize” Kashmiri society is reflected in his school’s motto —“in all things be men”—based on his analysis that Kashmiris had lost their manhood under centuries of slavery. Like other ethnographic literature of the time, ample evidence of racial superiority and ethnocentrism appears in Tyndale-Biscoe’s *Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade* . He displays remarkable insularity regarding his own position of power, which is a

manifestation of the British imperialist rule, even if he is primarily a missionary. In a section titled “Character of Kashmiris,” he narrates a time when he and his wife and infant son traveled to a village. The village *chowkidar* (watchman) comes running to check on the travelers. As Tyndale-Biscoe’s entourage pitch tents, he orders the *chowkidar* to provide them with milk and eggs. He writes:

I told him of our needs, and asked him to let us have some milk for the child as soon as possible. He answered, saying that he was very sorry there was not a drop of milk in the village. So I asked him what the babies of his village drank, and he said: “They always drink water.” So I told him not to be a fool, and to bring milk. He answered: “How can I, for there are no cows in the village?” At that moment I happened to catch sight of one of the cow tribe feeding on the village green. I said to him, “What animal is that?” pointing to it. “Can it be a bear?” “No, Sahib,” said he “it is not a bear, it is a cow; but all our cows are out of milk.” I said to him: “Well what about eggs?” To this he replied: “There are no hens in the village.” At this moment a cock crew, so I asked him: “What noise is that? Is that the voice of an eagle?” “No,” said he. “True, O Sahib, it is a cock’s voice.” “Well then be offquick and bring us eggs.” “I am very sorry,” said he, “I cannot do that either, for all the fowl in this village happen to be cocks.”

Tyndale-Biscoe’s rendition is meant to display the “Kashmiri” character of the *chowkidar* as duplicitous even when the cow and chickens are in plain sight. Such colonial recollections are not unique, and most prescribe that Kashmiris require proper training and governance to overcome their basic corrupt nature. In such a rendition, the faltering resistance that the *chowkidar* puts up to save his communal resources becomes invisible. These commodities would have been in extreme short supply given that the reigning monarch was heavily taxing people, which had pushed them into starvation and disease (see Thorp 1980 [1870]). From my vantage, the *chowkidar* is resisting Tyndale-Biscoe, the *angrez sahib*, a member of the colonial power and clearly not merely a benign force. From the mantle of the savior missionary, Tyndale-Biscoe is impervious to the *chowkidar*’s inverse resistance that deploys evasion and misinformation to avoid a direct confrontation to save resources. Yet the comical stalling also indicates a lack of strategy and a resigned knowingness that the colonial visitor will get his way. Almost all instances of resistance on the part of indigenous people

in Tyndale-Biscoe's book and similar works are cast as incivility and disobedience of Kashmiris to the authority of *angrez sahibs*, who project their desires and needs as the priority.

A British friend writing the preface to Tyndale-Biscoe's book recounts his own sojourn with a corpulent English colonial visitor in Kashmir. Not wanting to get his boots wet, the visitor commands a frail Kashmiri man to carry him over the stream. He climbs the back of the Kashmiri and once on the other side offers some compensation. The Kashmiri man declines and instead introduces himself as being the master in Tyndale-Biscoe's school. He expresses his happiness at having been able to serve the visitor. The author of the preface does not praise the humility of the schoolmaster but instead marvels at Tyndale-Biscoe's prowess at being able to attain his goal of producing a Kashmiri man with none of the natural vices of cowardice, greed, or malice.

Over the seventy years since Indian rule began in 1947, this type of ethnocentrism has taken on a new life in the Indian narrative, which serves today as a replacement for the British colonial accounts. The stereotype of Kashmiris as being ungrateful, traitorous, deviant, and terrorists is hyper-visible in the public discourse in India. This projected image draws from Kashmiris' religion, embodied ethnicity, and resistance to India as well as from their historical, cultural, religious, and affective relation to the region that became Pakistan in 1947. Thus the Kashmiri continues to be branded as the "Other." This tactic, like for the British in the colonial era, is crucial to India's maintaining control over the region and its people and justifying the extrajudicial abuses (see Zia 2018). The trope of the "obedient" Kashmiri still surfaces from time to time. A 2017 commercial for propagating tourism in Kashmir depicts an old Kashmiri man who is mistaken by Indian honeymooners for a guide. The Kashmiri man suspends his work and drives the couple around the whole day without a question. His behavior is uncannily reminiscent of the frail schoolmaster from the preface of Tyndale-Biscoe's book. This onus on almost slavish-obedience propagates the narrative that the only way to resurrect the Kashmiri identity to a modicum of respectability is through compliancy and servitude.

The history of ethnography took root during an era that can only be called illuminated darkness, but over the years it has steadily changed for the good. In her meditative essay on ethnography, Ruth Behar (2003: 16) has asked: “What can be salvaged from the original vision of ethnography to make it a project of emancipation?” For me, as an anthropologist, the redeeming quality of ethnography lies in its power of storytelling (Taussig 2003). I chose ethnography for this research to deploy people’s stories as analysis. I do not profess to be taking on the mantle of native anthropologist. The order of the authentic insider is questionable at best since the dichotomy of strict insider and outsider in an extremely globalized world does not exist (Narayan 1993). Kirin Narayan mentions Radcliffe Brown’s description of anthropologist M. N. Srinivas’s ethnography on the Coorgs as a “trained anthropologist, himself an Indian” (ibid.: v). Taking a cue from Radcliffe Brown, I describe myself as “a trained anthropologist, herself a Kashmiri.”

If we were to think symbolically, this ethnography is located in the village of the *chowkidar* from Tyndale-Biscoe’s book. So far, we have heard and read the narrative of the victor, while the *chowkidar* and his community is frozen in analysis. The pages of this book are filled with women, and men, who live and resist one of the most brutal military occupations in modern history. As one friend aptly said: Kashmir is a Palestine no one talks about.

ETHNOGRAPHIC POETRY AS EVIDENCE OF ETHICAL SURFEIT

The stories in this ethnography have been sifted through my intersubjective lens, which also manifests as ethnographic poetry. I took to writing as a young girl surrounded by deeply rooted cultural Islam, replete with worship practices centered around Sufishrines and literature, and reading Western books of fiction and nonfiction. I wrote poems and stories, publishing in local newspapers and magazines, tasting the soul-nourishing power of putting words to paper. Having been educated in an Irish Catholic

missionary school, English was my primary mode of instruction. While Urdu and Hindi were ancillary, Kashmiri language and literature was nonexistent in the school curriculum. The main focus was on Indian history and civics, with no evidence of our local Kashmiri history. The desperate need to learn English further isolated our generations from Kashmiri language and literature. This mass erosion of language was fueled by the deep desire for upward mobility in a postcolonial world where mastery over English was crucial.

I was introduced to the political issues surrounding Kashmir through debates and discussions that our older generation bequeathed upon us as a legacy frozen in time. Words and phrases like *rai-shumari* (self-determination), *maqbooza* Kashmir (occupied Kashmir), and *ilhaaq* (accession/treaty) were part of our *unsaid* and *unused* lexicon. They were unsaid and unused because, although they were spoken in private, there was little explicit political activity attached to them. In 1989 this politico-cultural discourse became a perfect ground for the armed struggle to take root. I found myself wanting to learn about Kashmiri history, and reading and writing Kashmiri. I got a chance to edit an Urdu magazine titled *Jehat* (Dimensions), which grounded me in writing poetry and prose in Urdu and translating from Kashmiri.¹⁰ English had become second nature, and I continued writing poetry in it. In 1999 my first poetry collection, *The Frame*, was published through a grant from the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages.

Around this time, Agha Shahid Ali (1987), who had already made his mark in the Western world, appeared on the horizon of English poetry in Kashmir. Shahid's poetry became a tongue for many young and old Kashmiris in need of an urgent voice to express their pain and suffering. His powerful poetry about his suffering homeland, bolstered by his longing visits, followed by his untimely death in 2001, sealed Shahid's status as the balladeer of Kashmir's political tragedy. One of his famous poems, "Stationery," ends with a simple hope: "The world is full of paper. Write to me" (ibid.: 48). This verse became a personal invocation, ensuring poetry

stayed a constant companion while I began the scholarly journey of anthropology.

As a doctoral student in anthropology, when I formally began my fieldwork in 2008, the poetry did not stop. While absorbing the events before me, I tried hard to stay true to the professional promise of an ethnographer. Sometimes with a pen in hand, most often not, I watched and saw; heard and listened; said and spoke; felt, realized, and recorded. There was always a dual lens before me—one belonging to the trained ethnographer, who was deliberate, measured, and careful not to let myself seep into what I was recording, and one who was not only seeping out but also absorbing. This second lens was that of the ethnographer-poet looming like a shadow, materializing without permission at every opportunity.

In the field, poetry was like a malaise, a constant ailment, because as an ethnographer, poetry was not supposed to be part of my methodological toolkit. At first, I wrote poetry for personal satisfaction, but I continued to think about how it affected my work as an anthropologist, where I had to keep subjective play in check. In this stringent exercise—part restrained passion and part deft calculation—I asked myself, “Where do I keep my poetry?” When the witnessing in the field arrived as a poem, what would I do with it, apart from recording it and shoving it under the pile of “real” field notes? Should I stop taking this side of my witnessing the field so seriously? If, after exhausting all means of understanding the field ethnographically, there was still this creative force pushing me into thinking through poems, who was I to stop it? Without thinking about disciplinary injunctions, I know poetry is an authentic expression on its own and needs no validation. My discomfort came with deciding where to fit poetry into my ethnographic data. As an ethnographer-poet, how valid would my research be if I allowed for a deeply subjective experience of poetry? Would it take away from or enrich my research? These are not my current misgivings, but they certainly were when I began my work as an anthropologist, and poetry continued to be one of the default modes for me to comprehend and process what I saw.

Without directly connecting them to my ethnography, I kept writing and publishing poems that emerged from the field. Poetry was something that I was doing on the sly next to my ethnography. I did everything to keep separate my anthropologist and poet sides. I took some time to understand and own ethnographic poetry, not because I was unconvinced but because my understanding was that it was not on par with “serious,” “scholarly” ethnography. I continued to use poetry as a form of ancillary documentation that was cathartic and as a meditative space for myself.

Around 2011, I became aware of anthropologists who had not only paid their theoretical dues to ethnography but had also served its humanistic and creative side (see Maynard and Canham-Taylor 2011). Most notable among them was Renato Rosaldo (2014), who has offered the paradigm of “antropoesia” for bridging the cultural and social scientific fields of poetry and anthropology. Through the lens of antropoesia in contemporary anthropology, poetry becomes a part of, if not entirely complementary to, the ethnography. Anthropologist-poet Adrie Kusserow, on a panel on ethnographic poetry at the 2016 Annual Anthropology Conference, posed these questions: “What ‘evidence’ does ethnographic poetry claim? And how is this evidence different from that produced by other forms of ethnographic writing?” These questions were productive for thinking about my positionality as a Kashmiri woman in this anthropological research. In the context of the evidence that ethnographic poetry claims, as I note elsewhere, “poetry makes one a witness, rather than just an archivist. One’s life-blood, all that is political and emotional, lived, remaining, and forgotten, coagulates into a poem.” This is also to say that I am a native anthropologist, and the field unravels before me in all kinds of formulaic and nonformulaic ways.

Ruth Behar (1996) has stated that the line between the observer and the observed cannot be easily drawn, but in my case it becomes apparent in the poetry. I understand my ethnographic poetry as evidence of an “ethical surfeit.” The ethnographer-poet directed by training faces a surfeit of witnessing in ways other than objectively, and this happens to all anthropologists, not just native anthropologists. Furthermore, because

participant observation as a methodology demands empathy with our research communities, the ethnographer-poet is doubly prone to experience and articulate the witnessing both in the field and the realm of the imaginary. In my case there was a third dimension, since I am also a native ethnographer. By terming this surfeit as “ethical,” I argue that the ethnographic poem is a “datum” crafted from observation and affect, and in the context of which the ethnographer-poet bears the most honest of evidence. Hence it is an ethical surfeit. The ethnographic poetry should be read as a link between the ethnographic prose and the anthropologist-poet; even as they exist in complementarity, they are not codependent.

The ethnographic poem is a moment of surfeit, where reason seeks the logic of surplus and escaping measured words. For me, an ethnographic poem becomes a moment of psychic participant observation, where there is an empathy, an experiencing, and a witnessing; a feeling and conveying. Translating the field is a dual labor—providing witness as a professional and as a dreamer. Not that poetry is dreaming, but there is an ethical responsibility that descends through the device of language for what remains beyond translation in the shorthand of the represented world. Thus, what you write about becomes a double responsibility; and one must render the field as an ethnographer and ethnographer-poet. Ethnographic poetry is a moment of surfeit as well as a catharsis of the excesses we as ethnographers have chosen to poke, dissect, and understand. The role of an ethnographer-poet is akin to holding a wound—a wound that is simultaneously in the body of the other and reflected in yours. Thus you will understand the pain without much pain, and doubly so. The few poems included in this ethnography, at the outset of each chapter, give a sense of this process.



you are always arriving in the night,
at dawn,
morning, quiet
during the day
sometimes—
a shadow
sometimes—
a voice,
brushing against me

you are always arriving
now, the door stays open
I am not afraid
of the soldiers or mice
now, only you arrive
all fear is gone

CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICS OF MOURNING

It was the cold winter of 2009, and I was on my way to the home of senior APDP activist Zooneh.¹ She lived with Babli and Lali in a two-room tenement in the historic city of Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital. Huge piles of frozen trash surrounded the home. Stray dogs, an increasing menace in Kashmir, were searching through the offal, trying to loosen bits to eat. Amid the barking of hungry dogs, I entered the decrepit house and was about to close the door behind me when Zooneh asked me to "leave the door a little open." At the height of an excruciating winter, when most Kashmiris I knew had sealed the cracks in their windows with old newspapers and plastic sheets, I found this fragile woman keeping her door half-open. I did not think much of Zooneh's decree, and throughout my visit that day I tried to stay far from the draft that continuously whipped through the open crack.

Gradually, as Zooneh opened up to me, I realized that she had a habit of keeping the door of her home a little ajar, to ease what she expressed as *wutarr* (feverishness/discomfort) and *damm* (choking). As my fieldwork progressed, the symbol of the door attained an important and meaningful place in my ethnographic observations. Zooneh often invoked the symbol of the door in various contexts. Sometimes she explicitly said, "I can never fully close my door. If I do, I feel as if I am being choked; it gets dark before my eyes. I keep my door a little open. . . . I feel like [her son] Syed Ahmed is just outside, waiting to come in. How can I just close it?"²

DOORS AND HAUNTING SPECTERS

In this ethnography, specters—ghosts of the disappeared—become visible-invisible in the lives of those who are living. The door is established as a spectral space—the threshold of being and presence, life and death, specters and ghosts, of departure and return. As an animated space where the return of the disappeared is conjured over and over, where Syed Ahmed is suspended in a state of return, without ever arriving, the door is a potent symbol of the continuing work of mourning: a politics of resistance. The figure of the ghost and the experience of haunting provides a framework for understanding the politics of mourning and how the disappeared body fuels the emerging experiences of resistance to the Indian military occupation.

Some of my other research participants also had a telling relation with doors, in that they did not feel comfortable locking them when they went out. Most of them, Zooneh included, made a point of ensuring that someone stayed at home. They would say, “What if someone was to arrive when we are not home?” This is an iteration of the common Kashmiri maxim that “a door should never remain closed.” Most Kashmiris use this phrase to convey a compassionate openness, a ready state of altruistic reception: What if someone in need drops by, even just for a visit? For the families of the disappeared, this ethos has become a habit heightened in intensity, ritual, and meaning, as the families are always in a state of waiting for the disappeared to return.

Sadaf Jaan, whose husband had been disappeared by the Indian army, always kept a key under a brick in her yard. She and her husband had had this arrangement before he was disappeared, where he would let himself in if he arrived home before her. The irony of Sadaf’s action was that she lived in a rented room, where she had moved after her husband was disappeared. If her husband was ever to return, he would not know where she lived, much less be expected to retrieve the key from the designated place. In constantly engaging with the idea of the disappeared’s arrival, the partially open door appears as a symbol of hope for the physical return of the beloved. The door serves as an icon of loss, mourning, agency, and resistance. Syed Ahmed, for Zooneh, is a continuously absent presence, invisible between apparitions, and enacted as a kind of invisible visibility, a

haunting. Hence the door is a threshold where Syed Ahmed is established as a specter, always hovering outside and waiting to come in.

ENFORCING DISAPPEARANCES

In 2002, Zooneh's son, Syed Ahmed, left for work one morning and never returned. According to witnesses, the notorious counterinsurgency regiment known as the Rashtriya Rifles abducted him in the marketplace and whisked him off to an unknown location. Thus Syed Ahmed became a victim of the tacit policy of enforced disappearance that has been in effect since 1989 (Duschinski 2010; Aggarwal 2008; Kazi 2009; Mathur 2016). Zooneh moved from pillar to post in search of her son but found no clues. The government forces denied any part in the disappearance. At first Zooneh's neighbors came forward as witnesses, even identifying the perpetrators that had kidnapped Syed Ahmed, but they were later forced to recant after receiving threats from the army and police authorities.

Often a disappearance occurs after a random arrest, like Syed Ahmed's, which can happen anywhere, where there may or may not be witnesses. The disappeared men rarely return. In the absence of due process, once the disappearance is enforced by the government forces, a slew of ragtag search processes begins, which has converged into a ritual for many families over the years. Since the armed militancy in Kashmir began, lodging a complaint (called a First Information Report [FIR])—whether in the case of an enforced disappearance or a killing or any other human rights abuse—has been difficult or nearly impossible, and there have been no investigations (Duschinski 2010; Mathur 2012a). In place of an FIR, many families would file writs of habeas corpus, which in any case have not produced results. Under the prevailing penal system, filing an FIR with the police is a prerequisite for an investigation to begin. Official documents in general, which could take the chain of complaint forward, have been difficult for the affected families to procure from the state authorities (see Duschinski and Hoffman 2011a). Zooneh's FIR for Syed's disappearance was rejected, and no investigation was initiated.³

It is rare for any documentation to provide direct acknowledgment of the disappearance. While the authorities do have statistics on disappearances, these can often be confusing, because the numbers recorded curiously change when different political parties run the government. The number of disappeared admitted by the government has ranged from 60 to around 3,744 (Human Rights Watch 2011; Swami 2007). In addition, the official term used is “missing persons,” not “disappeared.” Government records claim that most of the “missing” men were militants who were perhaps stranded across the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, or Pakistan, or who may have died during encounters with Indian troops (see Mathur 2012a and 2012b).

Refusal to accept an FIR is a confirmed policy decision that every police station tacitly followed, especially during the early years of the armed struggle (see Amnesty International 2011; Duschinski 2010). Thus Syed Ahmed’s annihilation, as in the case of other disappeared persons, was not only physical but also material, since there was no documentation or shred of evidence acknowledging his forced disappearance. Due to the nonexistence of FIRs, technically there are no enforced disappearances. It appears that the Indian military occupation has therefore made conditions perfect for *disappearing* the *disappearance* as well. Zooneh said:

No one listened [to us]. It was as if we lost a toy. One soldier said my son might have run away with another woman. Another one said he must be in Azad Kashmir training to be a militant. They all said what they liked. It seemed I had no case to fight. My son had landed a big painting contract a few days before he was disappeared. He had promised to buy us warm clothes and a gas heater for winter; why would he run away from his wife of less than two years, a newborn and me, his mother? My biggest tragedy after the event of his disappearance is I have no papers which will help me fight his case. There is no law; all we get from the authorities are *daleels* (fiction).⁴

The institutionalized violence makes a disappearance appear as an aberration of dubious origin, rather than a deliberate punishment. Thus, in times of such violent erasures and unspeakable violence, accessing legal avenues is impossible, and the struggle for memory and memorialization is thwarted as well. However, this does not mean forgetting or that no one

remembers or does not strive to. Zooneh's work with the APDP and her individual day-to-day struggle contribute to keeping the disappeared alive, reminiscent of many reputed gendered movements for similar causes in Latin American countries (Arditti 1999; Fisher 1989; Gordon 1997; Sanford 1997, 2003). The APDP's activism centers around the disappeared body, which in its absence becomes potent and hypervisible through its invisibility. One of the central engagements of this chapter is to convey the deeply visceral and affective process that has enabled the APDP activists, individually as well as collectively, to initiate and sustain their search for the disappeared and become a highly visible symbol of resistance to Indian military occupation in Kashmir.

AFFECTIVE LAW

The disappeared body and its annihilation within official records is an extraordinary event for the kin and the rest of the Kashmiris to behold. The open-endedness of the disappearance, the element of intrigue and secrecy, and family narratives conjuring the ordeal that the condemned body must have suffered at different stages of detainment all contribute to the materiality of the specter of the disappeared. Azi, whose son had disappeared thirteen years earlier while in the custody of the Indian army, said:

What did they do to him? Where is he? I am terrified of my own thoughts. . . . I imagine his blood is splattered on the ground; they drag his corpse . . . sometimes, I feel he is in prison, maggots crawling out of wounds . . . asking for water. . . . I run to see corpses they find; those limbless, eyeless bodies. . . . I fear they might have done the same to him. There is no end . . . there is no end . . . sometimes I think he is knocking at the door. I swear, sometimes I hear his moans.⁵

Such narratives become spectacular in the imaginaries of the searching kin, relatives, and neighbors as well as the general public. Similarly, Avery Gordon (1997: 112), in the context of enforced disappearances in Argentina, has written that disappeared persons make their "presence known to outside by mournful moans, terrifying agony."

In the narratives of the kin-activists, the disappeared body is imagined in varying degrees of duress. Even though the punishment is technically hidden and the disappeared person is physically erased, it is not hidden. “What did they do to him? Where is he? Did he escape alive? Did they kill him? How did they kill him?” These are common hauntings that permeate the social psyche with thoughts of unending torture and death from what is the unknown world of the disappeared. In place of an open execution, or a killing that would have occurred once, the torture on the disappeared body multiplies, replays, and becomes an unending, invisible scaffold within the personal and collective imaginations. The enforced disappearance becomes a perpetual psychic torture for the surviving terror-stricken people. Thus the disappeared person against all annihilation is established as a living ghost, a constant presence in the lives of their kin. While a reminder of a punishment, this ghost is not a negative presence but an exhortation for justice, of keeping the possibility of return open.

I propose we center ourselves near Zooneh’s door, which she keeps slightly ajar. The door manifests a haunting, not a figment of Zooneh’s imagination but an interstitial space—of a return, hope, resistance, and a quest for justice. The seemingly mundane act of keeping the door open enables me to understand the affective beginnings of a resistance that is deeply political. As part of feminist praxis, I propose this open door as a manifestation of what I call “affective law,” in contrast to the sovereign’s law that prevails over Kashmir and that has caused the enforced disappearances in the first place. I theorize affective law as a paradigm to manifest Zooneh’s quest for justice, as not just accidental but a deliberate effort to reclaim some power to get justice, despite the dangers to her life and moot legal options. Affective law enables me to bring into relief the agency of Zooneh’s activism and that of her comrades in the APDP, which often, in formal institutional narratives, might be sidelined as being accidental kin-based activism with little political value. The term “affective” here refers to the deeply emotional and haunting mourning for the disappeared. I use the word “law” to characterize a system of unwritten social and political practices that derive legitimacy from the fidelity with

which the women perform them to sustain the memory of the disappeared and to continue their search for them.

Sarah Ahmed (2004) has illustrated how emotions and affects as cultural politics create and align communities together even if they might not be in physical proximity. Drawing on the Derridean theory of language, Ahmed shows how the evocation of certain words, signs, or practices elicits emotional responses that only grow upon more repetition. These emotions are material rhetoric, which have the power to dictate modes of the social, psychological, economic, and political world. Thus affect and emotions can lead to a collective politics and social alliances. The analysis of intangibles, like emotion and affect, as an aspect of understanding resistance through a lens such as affective law offers a holistic way of looking at the struggles of women and how women construct and inhabit their gendered identities through embodied practices and dispositions as well as how they adapt their political, social, and cultural situations to attain their goals and survive everyday realities of a military occupation.

Characterizing this set of consistent practices as law gives it legitimacy in the face of sovereign law, which prevails but thwarts the processes of justice and memorialization in Kashmir. Therefore, the site of the doors—ordinarily just a contraption of wood and metal with hinges and latches, and countless openings and closings—becomes an extraordinary spatiality. Its part-openness manifests a law that is affective—a decree of continuous commemoration and an edict for the pursuit of justice, if not justice itself. Affective law is spectral and elusive if we only look for formal ways of seeking justice. However, within the ambit of detailed ethnography, when we pay scrupulous attention to the daily routines of the activists, we see a trail of persistent affective law, born of the politics of mourning, a constant invocation for justice and memory.

ZOONEH'S DOOR

Zooneh's relation with the door reminds me of Franz Kafka's parable "Before the Law" (1995 [1915]), where the door is a key site of events.⁶

Jacques Derrida (1992) uses this parable to explore the nature of justice, resistance, and law. In Kafka's parable a countryman comes to the door of the law and requests to be admitted. The gatekeeper tells him that entry is "possible but not now," thus deferring entry. The countryman spends his entire lifetime pleading and bribing the gatekeeper, expecting to gain entry at some point. The gatekeeper accepts the bribes but only to assuage the man that he is doing all he can to get him in. Toward the end, as the man is dying, he asks the gatekeeper why no one ever came to the door or passed through it. The gatekeeper replies: "The entry was meant only for you. I am now going to shut it" (Kafka 1995 [1915]: 184).

There are various readings of this parable that endeavor to understand the striking and paradoxical relation of man's liminal position to the law and justice. However, another dimension is added to Kafka's door when compared to Zooneh's door, which she keeps ajar. Around her door a resistance can be seen congealing; countermemory can be seen "becoming" against the institutionalized narratives of denial that the government propagates around the disappearances. Zooneh's resistance is not necessarily to dismantle the official narratives but to provide "memory alternatives" or countermemory. In this context Zooneh's relation to the law is not to get justice per se from formal institutions but is a way to preserve memory and create countermemory, which becomes her private mode of justice—a rudimentary reprieve from state terrorism.

Unlike Kafka's countryman, who sits outside the door of the law the entire time, I see Zooneh as agentive, alternating between sitting inside the door of her own home, the opening of which she herself controls, and outside the doors of formal institutions, like courts and other government offices. When she is inside her home, she forbids the closing of the door, becoming the gatekeeper of her own affective law. Thus the door becomes fecund with endless mourning for Syed Ahmed's return, whom Zooneh perceives as "around her" all the time; in this manner, she embodies a resistance to the sovereign power.

When Zooneh refers to Syed Ahmed's presence, she steers clear of Kashmiri words like *jinn* (ghost) or *ruuh* (spirit), which are commonly used

to define a dead person. Instead, she uses the word *saya* (shadow) to illustrate her son's presence. Besides "shadow," *saya* also means "shade" and is used to connote refuge or being under the influence of a spectral presence. The *saya* can be benevolent or demonic and can influence the possessed body to perform extraordinary actions. Zooneh's use of *saya* is, in the context of Syed being a benign, affective shadow, present in her life and also prevailing on her body, fueling and fortifying her activism. She referred to many ways in which her body registers his *saya* : a breeze or a brush; a whisper or a call; sometimes a touch to wake her up; and mostly as perceiving him being at the door, waiting to be let in. Zooneh registered one event of such a presence:

At dawn, I offered prayers. I felt the short curtain open wide, the room brightened with light. Who could have moved the curtain like that? The window was closed. It could not have been anyone else, because everyone was asleep. You see, a mother knows. The cord between us is not broken; Syed was telling me he is okay and waiting for me to find him. We have *ruhaniyat* (spirituality), I know he tries hard to send me *gaebi* (invisible/mystical) messages. We are Syeds ⁷; my son knew the Quran, its secrets. Our lineage is known for its spiritual powers. We have been practicing mysticism for generations; our ancestors knew how to travel across the universe without even lifting a foot. He [Syed Ahmed] knows how to reach me.⁸

Here Zooneh makes clear that she does not treat Syed as dead. It becomes evident that she sees his return as imminent as well as deferred. By invoking their spiritual lineage, Zooneh begins a phantasmatic and material reconfiguration of Syed Ahmed as always being by her side, transmitting spiritual messages or waiting to be found or in arrival. Zooneh's interior experience of mourning, of refusing to let go, coagulates as an affective law and the necessity of recognizing loss, sustaining grief, and memorializing. Syed Ahmed gains phantomic attributes, but he also has to be read as real and not just as a figment of imagination, an illusion, or a superstition. In this context Zooneh's open door, and thus her waiting, are not simply a place of refusal but inherently a place of physical and psychic mobility toward the aspiration for justice. As such, her door embodies affective law.

Although metaphorical in its aspects, keeping the door open is not only about envisioning that Syed Ahmed will come in but also fuels Zooneh's passage into the world of "other" doors to seek justice, such as the door of the institutional law. Ever since Syed Ahmed was disappeared, initially by trial and error and later with deliberate strategy, Zooneh has left no stone unturned to find her son. She has filed cases in the courts as well as with the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC), a recommendatory body that is set to investigate, promote, or protect human rights. While the government presents the SHRC as a major watchdog institution for safeguarding human rights, it remains a recommendatory body and cannot penalize anyone. As it has no power of adjudication, the SHRC is seen as a "toothless tiger" (Rashid 2011: 9). Zooneh calls the SHRC *lori dastaar* —a Kashmiri term that figuratively means "turban [displayed] on a stick," connoting it is a mere show and has no real power. Despite her advanced age, Zooneh is an active member of the APDP and a key participant in all activities of the group. She makes sure to visit political and administrative offices, hoping that some help in finding Syed Ahmed will materialize.

Refusing to believe that her son will never return, Zooneh remains steadfast in her ongoing mourning. At times she may have seemed melancholic because she did not accept closure, but her condition differed from true melancholia, in which there is a sustained and painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, and inhibition of all activity (Freud 1957 [1917]: 253). Zooneh's condition appeared as a chronic mourning or even a "hopeful melancholia," for she remained firm that she will "see" her son and does not want to die before his return. She does everything she can to retrieve and memorialize Syed Ahmed. Zooneh's mourning thus resembled the act as originally defined by Freud (ibid.)— that is, that of creating a relation with the lost object. The relation through mourning can occur by introjection or incorporation by integrating the memory of the lost one into a self-memory or a selfhood.

In Zooneh's life her son Syed Ahmed exists as a waking apparition in the day, and his visitations come as dreams at night, which she does not treat as illusions. Zooneh emphasized that Syed Ahmed appears in her

dreams especially before significant events, like APDP's monthly protest. According to her, she has the same dream every time, in which her son brings home some flatbread for breakfast and then vanishes. Zooneh then begins chasing him through forests and graveyards and finally loses him in a crowd. The crowd, Zooneh said, reminds her of the APDP protest. "Jaisey meri sabb sathi, meri behnein aagey peche [Like my sisters and comrades around me]," she said in Urdu, the language she often alternates with Kashmiri. She insisted that whenever she feels too tired to persist with her search, Syed Ahmed's *saya* returns forcefully: "I feel his touch on my shoulder. It seems like I could turn and catch his hand. It is moments like these that energize me." The constant haunting and the phantom pain of the loss have kept pushing Zooneh to activism even as finances are scarce and access to law is not only difficult but also impossible. Syed Ahmed's *saya* is productive in restructuring Zooneh's self in the present political moment.

OTHER DOORS

Kashmir is a land of spiritual heritage, and there is a long tradition of holistic healing practices. While activism and protest represent one form of Zooneh's struggle to retrieve Syed Ahmed, seeking blessings from shrines and saints for her search forms a huge part of Zooneh's agency. She has been to almost all the shrines across the valley. Many Sufi shrines are located high up in the mountains—a challenge for any able-bodied person to reach—but this has not kept Zooneh from climbing these hills and plateaus. Zooneh calls this Kashmiri tradition *pir-faqir karun* —a phrase that conveys seeking help from two categories of faith healers: *pir* (guide/teacher) and *faqir* (hermit/ascetic/mendicant).⁹ *Pirs* often claim to be descendants of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). Zooneh herself is from a lineage of *pirs*, who practice faith healing as a vocation. Although not as a rule, *pirs* often maintain a conventional lifestyle and transfer spiritual knowledge to their descendants. *Faqirs* are also faith healers, who may or may not belong to a specific spiritual lineage but are seen as divinely ordained. They can also be ambulatory, and not adhere to social

conventions, and engage in substance-induced trances to divine and heal people (Margoob and Mush-taq 2006). Due to overlap of practices and attributes between the categories, people use the terms *pir* and *faqir* interchangeably.

Zooneh is a devotee of the shrine of Hazrat Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, popularly called Amir-e-Kabir (noble leader), a revered Iranian Muslim saint from the medieval era whose missionaries propagated Islam in Kashmir. Zooneh rented rooms in Khankah, a historic town named after the spiritual retreat that Hazrat Amir had established on the banks of river Jehlum and today exists as a shrine in his honor. Zooneh looked forward to offering some of the mandatory five Islamic day-prayers on the premises. She said: “I get peace by sitting at Amir’s door, weeping, baring my heart without paying heed to people around.” Her attitude of acute obeisance is not out of the ordinary in Kashmir, where devotion to dead and living saints is part of the cultural heritage. Even though iconography is discouraged in Islam, historically Kashmiris have incorporated shrine rituals into their Islamic practices. A portion of Kashmiris follow the teachings of Ahl-e-Hadith, a reformist movement that began in North India and spread to the Kashmir region in the nineteenth century, which opposed these practices (B. Khan 2000). Yet for the majority of Kashmiris the shrine rituals remain pivotal for supplications, penance, and spiritual elevation. Zooneh made the intense ritual of frequent worship at Hazrat Amir’s shrine a spiritual strategy for Syed Ahmed’s return.

Collectively and individually, Zooneh’s comrades in the APDP make similar visits to shrines for supplications. They often share information with each other about *pirs* and *faqirs* whom they think might bring some clarity and comfort. Painting a vivid picture of the powers of her patron saints, Zooneh once said:

They [saints] are the ones really ruling Kashmir, and the entire universe, but they are invisible; their *saya* [shadow] is on everything. Only they have the power to return my son. Useless Bhaarti [Indian], earthly laws bind these judges, lawyers, and all the government officers. They cannot lift their bottoms from their chairs without orders from their superiors. Ask them to lift their finger? They cannot [do so] without orders. But my saints are *majaz*

[lawful/competent]; they can fly over mountains, cut through the stones, walk on water, and pass through closed doors, even if made of toughest cedar-wood. My saints are invisible miracle-makers even if they are not visible to our eyes.¹⁰

Zooneh contextualizes Syed Ahmed's birth as a reward from God, and his disappearance as *azmayish* (a test), which she wants to pass through with fortitude, prayers, and alms-giving, even when she has little to spare. She called her activism, a visible form of *ibadat* (worship) and likened it to *sadqa-e-jairiyah* for *falah-aam o khaas*. In Islam, *sadqa-e-jairiyah* means "continuous alms" or "charity," which can benefit the community or individuals even after the person is dead. In this context Zooneh sees her activism as bigger than her personal search for her son. Her use of *falahaam o khaas* is telling. *Falah* means "benefit," *aam* means "common," and *khaas* means "special." In her worldview she embraces APDP activism for the entire Kashmiri community that is under threat from Indian military occupation.

Zooneh has visited many *pirs* in hopes of finding her son. Most *pirs* in Kashmir use remedies drawn from the Quran and other mystic traditions of divining and succor to aid supplicants. Once I accompanied Zooneh to a *pir*. He was a kind, bearded man, who was from her lineage—a distant cousin. People waiting for their turn surrounded him as he sat behind a low desk, listening and writing. Zooneh told me that this *pir* is renowned for treating physical ailments and "finding lost things." In response to Zooneh's petition for Syed's return, he wrote her a *taweez* (talisman), which is a spiritual remedy drawn from the Holy Quran. Writing on tiny strips of paper, the *pir* produced minute calligraphy in saffron ink.¹¹ In the manner of a clerk working in a government office, *Pir-saeb*, as he was called, recorded the names, birthdates, and other details of Zooneh's family members, to be included with the other mystical contents of the *taweez*. He gave Zooneh a set of eight *taweez* to facilitate supplications for Syed Ahmed's return.

The eight *taweez* that Zooneh received were to be dispensed in different ways. One was to be embedded in the ceiling; the second and third were to be imbibed by the family with water or food; the third, fourth, and fifth were to be placed under stones in or around a graveyard, jail, and the court;

the sixth was to be thrown into the river; the seventh was to be kept in the file with paperwork related to Syed Ahmed's disappearance; and the last *taweez* was to be burned on a candle while Zooneh gazed into the flame, chanting verses from the Holy Quran and looking at Syed Ahmed's photo. After performing this last ritual, Zooneh had to tie a prayer knot in her scarf (*daeshh gandyin*). Tying prayer knots in headscarves or hanging them on the doors and windows of shrines are traditional supplication rituals in Kashmir. Devotees will often pledge alms or an animal sacrifice upon the granting of the wish, at which time they must also untie the knot. Since the shrines are often overrun with knots on their trellises, windows, and balustrades, any knot can be untied to represent the one that was tied previously. Zooneh had been tying knots on her own headscarf after special prayers. Such was the intensity of this ritual in her life that the scarf had left only a little area for more knots, indicating her wish was unfulfilled. Yet she persisted. Zooneh has tied prayer knots in almost all the shrines across Kashmir, which are waiting to be untied upon Syed's return.

Zooneh's *taweez* ritual involved rigorous effort, yet it had become routine and an invisible part of her life, like breathing, walking, eating, or drinking. Once I came across a few carefully wrapped *taweez* with the legal and official documents pertaining to Syed Ahmed's case, which she and so many other APDP activists simply called a "file." They lay neatly in a clear plastic bag, very much like other papers written in Urdu script, except, to a familiar eye, these papers were calligraphically unique. Zooneh's skepticism for the official documents was evident: "These official applications yield nothing; at least these [*taweez*] invoke God's name." The different dispensations for each *taweez* that Zooneh received from the *pir* traced the geographical, physical, and psychic contours of Syed Ahmed's imagined recovery. I did not dare ask Zooneh what she thought of the specific dispensations, but there was enough indication of the expanse of her hope as well as her fears.

Zooneh once went to her ancestral village to spend a fortnight with her brother, returning after only four days. Since 2011, there have been reports of increased wild animal attacks and maulings in Kashmir.¹² Apparently

Zooneh returned early because she was scared of the wild animal attacks. She insisted that the animals “did not come for the livestock,” as was commonly believed, but to “eat people.” She explained: “I am a mountain girl. I have never known wild animals attacking cattle; they have enough food in the wild. But my hunch is that the wild animals have tasted the flesh of dead boys thrown into jungles by the Indian forces; having tasted the human flesh, now they come down for more.”

Zooneh’s fears were not unfounded. In 2008 an independent tribunal released a report claiming that twenty-seven hundred unknown, unmarked mass graves, containing at least twenty-nine hundred bodies, in fifty-five villages in North Kashmir, had been probed. The tribunal noted the presence of more than six thousand unmarked and mass graves across the region (Chatterji et al. 2009). The idea of bodies being buried or thrown into the jungle remains foregrounded in people’s psyche. I did not know how right Zooneh was in connecting the wild animal attacks to the lure of human flesh, but it illuminated the depths of her tragic imaginaries. She said of her stay in the ancestral village that “the birds did not rest; they circled the skies even after dark. I felt they were eyeing the dead bodies in the jungle below.”

Another fear was revealed when Zooneh said: “My brother put so many things against the door making sure the animal could not come inside. He put a huge grinding stone on top of wooden blocks and a large tin trunk. The door was so tightly closed that not even a little air could enter; *me goe dam* [it choked me]. I could not stay there.” On the surface Zooneh seemed to worry for her own safety, but she was clearly disturbed by the thoughts of dead bodies strewn in the jungle. And the door being closed too tightly to safeguard the household from animal attacks went against the affective law, under the decree of which she always keeps the door slightly ajar for Syed Ahmed’s return. Given these concerns, she left her ancestral village earlier than expected.

TRANSGENERATIONAL MOURNING

The return of the disappeared and the motif of the door permeate the psychic imaginaries of not just Zooneh but even Lali, her granddaughter. Lali was about nine years old at the time of this research. She had been less than a year old when her father was disappeared. Growing up, Lali had witnessed her grandmother and her mother endlessly searching for her father. As Zooneh put it, in search of Syed Ahmed, Lali had waited hungry and wailing with her family at the doors of army camps, police stations, jails, and courts. Most of Lali's earliest memories were of the monthly protests and trips taken to find her father. Lali took part in media interviews, especially when her mother and grandmother required translation. Lali and her family have been the subject of many media reports, documentaries, and photo essays on enforced disappearances.

Like many girls her age, Lali was impish and clever, and she liked to dress up. She did not like studying and had been held back a year in school to catch up. In other aspects of her personality, even though her mother and grandmother loved her fiercely, it was clear that Lali had been deeply traumatized by her father's disappearance. The intensity of Lali's grief revealed itself on a day when she participated in a workshop on trauma counseling through art held by a local nongovernmental organization. In the two pictures Lali drew, one showed only a tiny house in the middle of the large white sheet of paper. While explaining her drawing to the counselor, Lali said: "This is my home with a garden. I like flowers a lot." The counselor, trying to understand, asked: "I see only the house—a cute, tiny house—where is the garden?" Lali replied: "It is around the house; but I showed only the house."¹³ In another picture she drew three doors, again, on a tiny house. To the question of why the tiny home had three doors, Lali replied: "These are for Papa to return to us."

In Lali's first picture the garden is present by its very absence, making palpable how her reality had repositioned itself to invisibility; for Lali, things exist even if they are not seen, just like her father. The second picture with the three doors makes apparent that Lali suffers from a multiple waiting, including her mother's and grandmother's. She made apparent a surfeit of waiting at doors. While Zooneh and Babli, having seen Syed

Ahmed alive, relived his memories and his disappearance, Lali lives in what Gabriele Schwab (2010) has called postmemory. The intergenerational transmission of the spectral presence of Syed Ahmed's life and disappearance manifests as nescience—a gap in knowledge, where the trauma resides in Lali's life. For Lali, phantom hauntings at the door represent a radical reorientation of her imagination, because her mourning does not spring from a direct observation of her father's disappearance but from someone else's psychic traumas. Lali lives her father's life and eventual disappearance through her family's memories—daily recalls, photographs, and artifacts, such as old clothes that had been preserved by her mother and grandmother.

Lali had become the recipient of her family's lived memories as well as their somatic memories. She read her mother and grandmother for silences, for laughter, for words, to trace her father's life and disappearance and thus make meaning of it. The perpetual haunting prevalent in Lali's life had left somatic imprints on her. Like her mother and grandmother, she suffered from debilitating neck and backaches, which are rare in a child of her age. The doctors had attributed them to stress. Having imbibed the spectrality around the door, Lali too had accepted the legacy of her grandmother in keeping the door a little ajar. Mimicking her grandmother, Lali once remarked: "I feel faint if the door is closed."¹⁴ She did not know the explicit reason why Zooneh keeps her door open, except that she feels a feverish discomfort.

Lali was living a violent history even in the mundane routines of her life, through turbulent flashbacks of Syed Ahmed's habits, desires, and disappearance, which both her mother and grandmother often related. Lali was a very picky eater, and doctors had diagnosed her with anemia. She would eat with gusto only on the day when her favorite curry of meat with collard greens was cooked. Babli tried to cook the dish once in a while, since they could not afford meat every day. Besides the expense, it was a difficult decision for Babli and Zooneh to cook this specific curry because it had been Syed Ahmed's favorite. On the day they cooked this dish, the conversation alternated between regret for partaking the meal without

Syed's presence and celebrating the similarities between him and Lali. To me, having never seen Syed Ahmed except in some photographs, Lali looked like a younger version of Babli; in fact, they were often mistaken for sisters. Invoking Syed Ahmed's similarities with Lali seemed like a way for the older women to incorporate a father's presence into the warp and weft of Lali's daily routine and keep his memory alive.

Lali followed most of the routines that her mother and grandmother had created around Syed Ahmed's disappearance. When not in school, Lali accompanied Zooneh to the shrine of Hazrat Amir Kabir; sometimes she took the responsibility of attending on her own if Zooneh was unwell. Once Lali joined the Friday prayers on behalf of Zooneh, who was sick, while Babli stayed back to nurse her. Lali replicated all the shrine rituals that Zooneh did upon entering the premises. She first went to one side of the compound to customarily feed the birds in the courtyard. "This is what Grandma does first," she told me.¹⁵ Feeding the birds occupied a significant status in Zooneh's supplication rituals for Syed Ahmed's return. Lali repeated Zooneh's sentiments when she explained the act: "This is a good deed which will help in God listening to our prayers for Papa." With maturity far beyond her years, Lali carried this burden of feeding the birds as part of the supplication rituals for her father. For a brief moment, when the birds pecked at her toes, the activity was delinked from the burden of memory. I sensed a change of mood, when she laughed and jumped with childlike glee. Then, as if suddenly jarred back, Lali blurted: "Oh, I forgot the other side." She dashed to the other side of the courtyard, replicating her grandmother's routine, manifesting the bindings of affective law and how it was not meant to be broken.

Lali's memory of her father was a bricolage of broken narratives that come in spurts from her grandmother and mother. One picture that Lali drew at school occupied the pride of place in their room: it depicted her mother, father, and herself. She had drawn a big watch on her father's wrist, which she explained he wore when he was a *mahraaz* (bridegroom). Lali had never seen the watch because Syed Ahmed sold it before she was born. She must have heard about the watch or gleaned its likeness from a few

hazy pictures of her father. The cap in the picture drawn on Syed Ahmed had “Spiderman” written on it; Babli had mentioned once that he had worn this cap the day he disappeared. Lali had patched together a history of her father’s life from fragments and overlapping multiple renditions that she had never lived but had experienced only in flashbacks and traumatic flareups of memory in her mother and grandmother. Lali used whatever props she could find in stories that her family told her, adding to her own silence, grief, rage, and despair, perpetuating her work of mourning.

NOT EVEN IN DEATH DO US PART

The apparitions of the disappeared haunt the contemporary psychic and cultural landscape of Kashmir. The hauntings and the waiting prevail not only in the lives of the survivors but oftentimes even at the last breath. This was manifest in the events surrounding the deathbed of reputed activist Mogal Maas, who was about seventy-five years old at the time of her passing in 2009. She was a very well-known APDP activist who had been searching for her son, Nazir Ahmed, who was forcibly disappeared in 1990. For years, Mogal Maas was at the forefront of APDP’s sit-ins, vigils, demonstrations, and meetings. She is the central protagonist in several acclaimed documentaries that brought awareness to enforced disappearances.¹⁶ As a single mother, Mogal Maas had brought up Nazir. She was the quintessential Kashmiri woman from the older generation, who had raised and educated her son on her earnings from spinning Pashmina wool. Nazir became a teacher. After his disappearance, Mogal Maas had confined herself to a single room in her dilapidated house, solely focusing on searching for her son. As she grew as an activist, Mogal Maas expressed her struggle as representative of the Kashmiris in general, not limited to the loss of her son.

Before Nazir disappeared, the high point of Mogal Maas’s day was having afternoon *nun-chai* (green tea with salt and milk) with her son. They would sit for a long time and mull over the day’s events. For many years after Nazir’s disappearance, Mogal Maas would prepare tea and wait for the

miracle of Nazir returning as suddenly as he had disappeared. She became apprehensive about locking her home when she left to do errands. She did not entrust the key to her house to anyone because her relatives, in Nazir's absence, were trying to force her to bequeath her house to them. Mogal Maas steadfastly insisted that the house was Nazir's to keep after his return. She died just some hours short of October 27, 2009. She had been ailing in the final years of her life, but she continued to give interviews and receive visits from her APDP comrades, who had become her family. In Mogal Maas's last days, Parveena Ahangar and other close APDP activists visited her regularly. They updated her on events, and she remained as feisty as ever, "praying hard for justice, cursing India and its military to her heart's content."

Mogal Maas did not find her son, but her politics of mourning became spectacular even at the time of her passing. The event that occurred on her deathbed reveals the form in which affective law manifests—an intimate form of justice, if not justice itself. Just before closing her eyes forever, she murmured: "Maine Nazira, aa kha [My Nazir, you have come (or have you come?)]" (Jaleel 2009). *Aa kha* in Kashmiri is used to acknowledge someone who arrives. It is also rhetorical and sometimes may be used to elicit an affirmative response from the addressee, which can be a simple nod or a full-fledged account of the events that preceded the return. At the moment of its utterance, the phrase involves only two people acknowledging each other. Thus, in her final moments, Mogal Maas performed a spiritual imaginary, conjuring Nazir's incorporeal return. I read it as a testament to her politics: a harkening to justice and her resistance.

This conjured arrival of Nazir is a manifestation of the haunting aspects of affective law. Mogal Maas's invocation of his arrival at her deathbed resonates with Jacques Derrida's (1994) reminder about the politics of mourning, which is not only living with ghosts but also dying with them. The mourning as it culminates on Mogal's deathbed and Zooneh's door becomes "a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generation" (Derrida 1994: xviii–xix). The grief and mourning, weeping and worship, waiting outside doors, activism, and relationship with the law, government

institutions, and court documents all become a complex transaction and symbols of the affective law, a subaltern power, an agency, and a resistance to Indian rule.



A brief electoral history of peace
there was no vote
—only war

CHAPTER 2

THE KILLABLE KASHMIRI AND WEAPONIZED DEMOCRACY

I first met Shabir Mir, a slight and painfully polite man, when he was looking to consult doctors for a chronic wound in his abdomen, the result of torture at the hands of the Indian army. Shabir is pivotal to this ethnography because he experienced being disappeared. He had been in the custody of the Indian army for twenty-eight months during which his family knew nothing of his whereabouts. His predicament illustrates how the Indian nation-state constructs bodies that are seen as fit to be eliminated without accountability. Shabir recalled that the soldiers, while torturing him, encouraged each other by saying, “Harami ko azadi chahiye, aukaat to dekho saley ki? Iss desh drohi ko maut dedo; azadi mill jayegi; kodey mein dalo, ye sab saley deshdrohi hain, dedo inko azadi [This bastard wants freedom (from India). What audacity! Kill the bloody traitor; give him freedom (from life); throw him in the trash; they (Kashmiris) all are sisterfucking traitors; give them freedom (from this world)].”¹

This passage encapsulates how a Kashmiri body is socially and politically constructed and perceived by the Indian military occupiers. In the state of exception, created by the Indian military occupation in Kashmir, the legal order operates only by suspending the law itself. This suspension becomes the rule and the law in force without significance, as Giorgio Agamben (2005) has reminded us. Shabir’s experiences inside the secret prison illustrate how the “killability” of the Kashmiri body is justified. The killable Kashmiri body (Zia 2018)—one that can be killed without remorse

or accountability—is the turf on which the spectacle of power is staged by the Indian nation-state. This language hurled by the soldiers at Shabir is not unique and has been heard by most Kashmiris in different iterations, the sum of which marks them as the “Other” fit to be killed because they desire liberation from India. Shabir’s life story is an exemplar of Kashmiri haplessness.

MAKING THE OTHER

In 1991, Shabir was detained under false allegations of being a militant. According to his wife, Taja, Shabir became *gaeb* (disappeared) in custody, and she began the frantic ritual of searching for him. The army and police denied he was in their custody. Then, one random evening, two years and four months later, Shabir was found comatose, abandoned in a school building that had been used as a makeshift camp–cum–interrogation center by the army. Shabir had a ruptured abdomen, his rectum was infected, and wounds festered all over his body. Emaciated and severely injured, he survived but only after many corrective surgeries. He nevertheless ended up with severe disabilities. Most often, men who are forcibly disappeared are never found, and Shabir’s return was nothing short of a miracle for his family.

Shabir recalled the torture inflicted on his body. His pain would be multiplied when the soldiers administered a mix of water, chile, and electricity to his wounds. “They [Indian soldiers] would electrocute me; I lay writhing. . . . Torture in the night was the worst because they would get drunk; that’s when most boys would get killed. They would beat us nonstop; some boys just died like that.” Shabir had been taken to the brink of death many times. He recounted the experience:

My survival is a miracle. I thought every night was my last. A wounded boy once begged for water while taking his last breaths. I dragged myself near him. Such was his thirst that he pleaded for me to spit into his mouth, and I did. Despite this being a nasty act, the boy looked thankful and closed his eyes. The next day, his body was gone. I do not know if someone found him or not. From what I could guess, we were somewhere on an elevation, with trees

around; maybe they just dumped the bodies, and they would never be found and would be disappeared forever.²

How can this torture be explained? Scholars have documented how, in varied ways, nationalism is constructed on the body, which becomes a literal and metaphorical vehicle for people's collective fears, hopes, and commitments. The nation-state appears by asserting itself through the habitual performance of power, where it prevails physically and symbolically over people (Aretxaga 1997). Shabir's predicament becomes symbolic of how the Indian government's insignia is branded on the Kashmiri body, even when the body is made invisible or disappeared altogether. Many scholars have detailed the brutality of the Indian government's policies in Kashmir (Kazi 2009; Duschinski 2010; N. Kaul 2011; Bhan 2013; Verma 2016; Robinson 2013; Snedden 2013; Mathur 2016; S. Kaul 2017; Duschinski et al. 2018). The Indian administration has been called "catastrophic," which has made people's lives subservient to consolidating borders and state security, paving the way for their annihilation or destruction (Bhan 2013: 7; Duschinski and Hoffman 2011a, 2014; C. Mahmood 2000). International watchdogs, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have issued reports criticizing India and claiming that it has lost its moral ground in integrating Kashmir into its borders (Kumar 2010). In 2018 the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published a historic report assessing the human rights situation in Kashmir. The report marks the beginning of a potentially momentous shift in the international human rights community's recognition of Kashmiri people's situation and aspirations in this underreported war zone.

Under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA, implemented in 1991), every Kashmiri is a potential suspect. Anyone can be stopped, or even shot, without any explanation. Thus, day in and day out, Kashmiris are subjected to unmediated power, where everyone is effectively reduced to the status of killable. The icon of Shabir's body in the context of the phrase hurled at him by the soldiers (mentioned at the beginning of the chapter)

becomes an analytic for understanding the killable body. The Kashmiri body as killable is constructed from all the stereotypical markers of the Other—both material and immaterial. In the immaterial form the markers around the Kashmiri body are discursive categories, like the demand for nationhood, which, emptied of its history, is seen as traitorous by the Indian government, its army, and its citizens. The armed militancy is decontextualized from the events preceding 1947, portrayed only as propensity for violence fueled by global terrorism. The affective relationship that Kashmiris have with Pakistan through a shared historical, geographical, cultural, and religious heritage has also led to this Othering. India projects Kashmir's historical ties with Pakistan as unnatural.

In material form the type of dress and demeanor of a person becomes suspect. The keffiyeh (typically a Palestinian scarf or its South Asian version), beard, kohled eyes, and carrying a Quran or Urdu or Arabic scriptures are seen as part of a habitude that foretells of an “Islamist,” “radical,” “pro-freedom,” “pro-Pakistan,” or “fundamentalist”—all terms that are used stereotypically to insinuate militant influences drawn from Islamic principles. In Kashmir fearful families often discourage young men from adhering to such dress or demeanor, and even to avoid having a beard, to avoid endangering their lives. It is telling that 99 percent of the disappeared men in Kashmir have been civilian Muslim males, with most of them being bearded (Choudhury and Moser-Puangsuwan 2007). These material markers appear as what Lisa Malkki (1995) has called “body-maps,” which demarcate the enemy's body from oneself (see Weiss 2004). These body-maps are reinforced in the public narrative, especially by the media. The Kashmiri body, in the Indian perception, is cast primarily as the Other—a Muslim and, by extension, even a Pakistani or a traitor body.³ The body with “certain Otherness,” which can harm the nation, makes it possible for the government to carry out extrajudicial abuses (Kumar 2010).

In many versions of the aforementioned quote, Shabir heard himself being branded a “Pakistani,” even though he believes in an Independent Kashmir. This labeling comes from the Indian fear about the overarching affective allegiance of Kashmiris to Pakistan—a country with which a

faction wants to merge—but it also stands as a proxy for everything that is perceived as Other, including those desirous of separate nationhood.⁴ The Otherness of Kashmiris, the majority of whom are Muslim, is also connected to the trope of Muslim deviance that proliferates in the Indian polity.⁵ Historically, Muslims in India (and not just Kashmiri Muslims) have been cast as a volatile group. The communal tensions between majority Hindus and minority Muslims have fueled many pogroms and massacres (see Nussbaum 2007). In general, the perception of Indian Muslims, even if they did not choose to go with Pakistan in 1947, is of the Other in India. Thus the hypervisibility of the Kashmiri body increases because it is not only a Kashmiri body but also a Muslim body, making it doubly killable.

Reminiscent of Damien's public execution in 1757 after he attacked the king in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977a), a similarly killable Kashmiri body is made into an identifiable and representational threat for dissenters. In the hands of a nation-state, the killable body becomes useful for creating an easily identifiable enemy: a traitor, a deviant for the masses, who unite against it. The act of killing Kashmiris has even been narrativized in the media as a "habit" of the Indian soldiers.⁶ The landmark case of a former Kashmiri militant, Afzal Guru, who was indicted in the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, is illustrative of how a killable Kashmiri body, once constructed, can be fair game, even for being hanged. Even though we can argue that the cases of Guru and Shabir are different, both are symbolic of how a Muslim Kashmiri body is made killable under law. Even though Guru's case was weak, containing only circumstantial evidence, he was hanged in 2013 for what the Supreme Court of India openly called an act to satisfy "the collective conscience" of the Indian society ("Supreme Court Judgement on Afzal Guru" 2013). Juridical power, time and again, appears as a result of a political approach to national security (Saumya 2009).

Guru was constructed as an exemplary killable Kashmiri body on which the spectacle of the sovereign power of the Indian state played out (Zia 2018). His media trial, his portrayal in public, the lack of legal amenities, and his Muslimness and Kashmiriness all contributed to his construction

into an adversary whom the Indian nation made sure to annihilate (ibid.). Thus, in this context, the killability of the Kashmiri body is manifested as a singular act of nation making. As human rights lawyer Parvez Imroz put it: “They can disappear anyone: me while I am talking to you or even you . . . anyone can be killed or disappeared at any time, without reason.”⁷ This fear is often expressed by Kashmiris. The act of forcible disappearances, killing, maiming, or blinding is an annihilating warning to all those potentially subversive Kashmiris. Even after Shabir returned from incommunicado detention, for instance, his tortured and chronically wounded body continued to carry the insignia of the Indian state’s coercive sovereign power.

Since 1947, the region of Kashmir has been caught in an ebb and flow of both visible and invisible forms of violence. Stereotypically presenting Kashmir as a dispute between India and Pakistan is a reductionist view, which neglects the Kashmiri people’s aspirations for a sovereign nationhood that predates the partition of British India and the Princely States. Since then, India has legitimized its military occupation of Kashmir by deploying a politics of democracy. I use the phrase “politics of democracy” to emphasize that it is not democracy in its true form that exists in Kashmir, but rather the symbols of democracy, such as the “elections” that have been utilized to entrench and extend Indian rule. In this context democracy becomes a tool to “serve territorial nationalism” (Junaid 2013a: 166). A chronology of events pertaining to the contesting Indo-Pak nationalisms over Kashmir illuminates how the postcolonial nation-state of India established and legitimized a military occupation in Kashmir (Osuri 2017; Bhan, Duschinski, and Zia 2018). Under these conditions, suspending the basic human rights of Kashmiris, as illustrated by Shabir’s experience, and suppression of dissent by government forces with impunity became a norm.

In 1931 in the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir a key incident occurred when the Kashmiri Muslims revolted against the Hindu monarch Hari Singh of the Dogra dynasty. During a mass demonstration the king’s police killed twenty-two Kashmiris. Today the historical martyrs’ graveyard

dedicated to these men stands as a testament to Kashmir's aspiration for an independent sovereign democracy.⁸ At the time of the massacre, almost a century had passed since 1846, when the British colonial government had sold the entire region of Kashmir to Hari Singh's warlord ancestor Gulab Singh. The British colonizers had imposed territorial and administrative unity over the disparate geographical and cultural provinces—namely, Kashmir, Jammu, Ladakh, and allied regions—jointly referred to as the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. Gulab Singh bought the territory along with its people for seventy-five thousand Nanak Shahi rupees and an annual present of one horse, twelve shawl goats, and three pairs of the finest Kashmiri shawls to the British Crown. The hundred years of Hindu Dogra rule were ruthless for the majority of the Muslim Kashmiris who lived in de facto slavery. This period became generative of political and economic awakening in the Kashmiri people (Rai 2004; Zutshi 2003). In 1932 newly educated young Muslim men forged a political movement to fight for people's rights and ultimately gain democratic sovereignty.

The dispute over Kashmir between India and Pakistan began with the 1947 Indo-Pak partition, which was predicated on religious difference. While nominally secular, India became a Hindu-majority nation, and Pakistan became a homeland for Muslims. Dominantly Muslim, Kashmir was largely expected to integrate with the newly formed Pakistan with which it had geographic contiguity, trade, and cultural links. The monarch of Kashmir was indecisive about acceding to either country and wanted to explore the option of independence. Meanwhile, he signed a “standstill” agreement with Pakistan to ensure that essential services—trade, travel, and communication—remain uninterrupted. Pakistan saw this as a forerunner to the accession and its indisputable claim to the region. The Indian leaders had started their diplomacy to acquire Kashmir long before 1947 (Noorani 2014). The majority of Kashmiris at that time preferred to stay independent and not join either of the two countries (see Whitehead 2008: 26–27).

From August 15, 1947, when India and Pakistan became two dominions, until October 27, 1947, when the Indian military landed by plane, Kashmir was an independent state. By then the Indo-Pak partition

had descended into communal violence. In the region of Poonch in West Kashmir an armed revolt was building under the name of Azad (Independent) Kashmir Regular Forces (Duschinski et al. 2018) to create an independent state (Lamb 1991; Snedden 2013). The king suppressed the revolt brutally, but the rebels successfully liberated part of the region declaring the Azad (Independent) Kashmir provisional government on October 24, 1947. By this time the communal violence of the Indo-Pak partition spilled into Kashmir's Jammu province. Approximately two hundred thousand Muslims were killed in an ethnic cleansing that the king endorsed (Lamb 1991; Howley 1991; Copland 2005; Lone 2009).

In the Indian narrative what followed the Poonch revolt is called an “invasion by Pakistan” or pejoratively the “Qabaili raid,” referring to the ethnic clansmen who came to Kashmir's aid from the North West Frontier Provinces (NWFP) of the newly founded Pakistan to aid the Poonch revolutionaries.⁹ The ethnic clansmen had long-standing family, cultural, and trade ties with the people in Poonch, and they were impassioned to fight alongside their co-religionists against the impunity of the Hindu king. Fearing loss of territory, the king asked India for military support. The Indian government agreed with the precondition that the king accede to India and promised to hold a plebiscite to decide the region's final fate. The king agreed to a treaty of accession for the entire Princely State, retaining control in all matters except defense, currency, and foreign affairs.

In 1948, after the first full-scale war broke out between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, India took the issue to the United Nations, where it repeated its commitment to a plebiscite. The UN brokered a 485-mile-long cease-fire line that split the region in two. One-third of the territory, including the far northern and western areas along with Gilgit-Baltistan, ended as a semiautonomous entity administered by Pakistan, known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).¹⁰ The remaining two-thirds of the region, including the valley of Kashmir and the provinces of Jammu and Ladakh, came under Indian control.¹¹ The promised plebiscite was never held.

The Indian narrative since 1947 has dominated explanations of the Kashmir dispute in which violence by the militia from the NWFP is made

hypervisible and a vested silence is maintained on the barbarity of its own military (Lamb 1991: 143). Revisionist scholars have challenged India's arguments, especially those that obfuscate Kashmir's historical demand for a democratic sovereignty by varyingly presenting the Kashmir issue as Pakistan's proxy war, or reducing it to the erroneous stereotype of "Islamic terrorism" and relegating it to a domestic law-and-order situation. Exhaustive analysis of events surrounding the Indo-Pak partition, when borders were in flux and people's loyalties had not concretized, has established that India was no less an aggressor (Lamb 1991; Schofield 1996; Osuri 2017); there is a discrepancy in the signing of the treaty of accession with India (Lamb 1991; Schofield 1996, 2004) and the Poonch uprising was a revolt not an invasion (Lamb 1991; Snedden 2013). In light of the liberation of the Azad Kashmir region, questions are even being raised on the validity of the king acceding the entire Princely State to India (Lamb 1991; Snedden 2013).

ELECTIONS AS POLITICS

The United Nations responded to the status quo between the countries by forming the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP).¹² Later, a Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was deployed, which continues to monitor the cease-fire in the region. In 1949 UNCIP recommended handing over the region to a quasi-sovereign power of the plebiscite administrator. The UN crafted several plebiscite models, all of which failed due to the competing preconditions put forth by the two rival countries. In 1951, India concertedly began a policy of legitimizing its military occupation by establishing a permanent government through holding elections for a constituent assembly. The mechanism of constituent assembly had been used under the British rule to draft the constitution of India and had also served as the first parliament. Pakistan protested, arguing that India was planning to finalize the accession, which India denied.¹³

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) warned India "that the assembly might conflict with its recommendations still sub judice and

deemed the course of action out of order” (Lamb 1991: 175). But India went ahead and conducted the ill-founded elections, which were rigged in favor of a Kashmiri political party that sided with India. The UN dispatched several mediators to investigate the election malpractice and continued exploring options for demilitarization and a plebiscite. After 1954, Cold War rivalries froze the Kashmir dispute. Further international mediations failed, sidelining both the UN and the voice of the Kashmiri people. The Indian government continued its policy of legal annexation, issuing a presidential order that extended Indian citizenship and the fundamental rights charter to Kashmir (Lamb 1991; Bose 2004). This charter is one of the Trojan horses of India’s policy, which is unique in permitting preventive detention to curb threats to national sovereignty or public order. This policy enabled the Indian government to curb dissent against it inside Kashmir (Noorani 2011; Duschinski and Ghosh 2017). Thus India’s coercive policy of legitimizing its governance through legal rulings and paring Kashmir’s autonomy was well under way. Haley Duschinski and Shrimoyee Ghosh (2017: 314) have called this “occupational constitutionalism” a form of legal incorporation of Kashmir that “became sedimented through the work of the courts across time.”

India has historically propagated the notion that the 1951 and successive elections are proof of Kashmiri endorsement of the accession treaty, thereby negating the need for a plebiscite. This narrative conveniently obfuscates the analysis that calls its electoral democracy “subverted and permanently retarded” (Bose 1998: 27) and “flawed” (Navlakha 2009), which has only been successful through rigging to prop up predetermined candidates who favor Indian accession (Bazaz 1978; Lamb 1991; Noorani 2014). India intended to rule Kashmir as a party state (Bose 1998), and those perceived in any measure adverse to expanding Indian constitutional jurisdiction have been disqualified for insubstantial reasons or harassed or imprisoned. The elections held in 1962, 1967, and 1972 were also brazenly rigged (Nehru 1997; Bose 2004) and ultimately completely sidelined the movement for a plebiscite.¹⁴ In 1964, India further eroded Kashmir’s special status to bring it to par with its other states. Kashmiri people responded with angry

protests, which the government put down with brutal force. The 1960s saw the rise of the Al-Fatah armed movement for the independence of Kashmir, which the Indian government repressed in under a decade. By the 1970s the incarceration of the local leadership and coercive politics ensured that opposition to Indian expansion policies was severely undermined.

The year 1987 was a watershed moment. Many notable Kashmiris, who wanted to raise the question of political dispute of Kashmir under the UN mandate, decided to stand for elections under the banner of the Muslim United Front (MUF).¹⁵ Despite popular support, the MUF lost after massive and concerted rigging by a party that unsurprisingly favored India. In the protests that ensued, government forces killed four people and arrested the MUF cadre. Some analysts propagate the idea that the Kashmiris resorted to arms because India did not allow democracy to flourish in Kashmir (see Behera 2006). However, my interviews with former MUF supporters indicate that the electoral loss only shifted their policy of participatory politics. Their primary intention had not been governance but to gain control of the assembly and revive the Kashmiri demand for self-determination and independence.¹⁶ Thus the seeds of the Tehreek (the resistance movement against Indian rule) were sown long before but “did not come to fruition until 1988– 89” (Lamb 1991: 336).

Since 1947, the right to dissent in Kashmir has been curbed. People cannot network and organize to pursue their ideals of self-determination and independence in a lawful manner. The only political parties that have permission and patronage from the government are pro-India. Currently most of the leaders of the Tehreek, who are part of the Hurriyet (Freedom) Conference (a conglomerate of twenty-eight political resistance parties formed in 1991), are often incarcerated, harassed, and placed under restrictions. Recent years have seen increased attacks on the media through censorship, and journalists are often beaten or harassed (Reporters Without Borders 2013). Full-fledged gagging of the local media, the Internet, and mobile phones is recurrent. The undemocratic foundation of the Indian governance in Kashmir is evident at no less a time than during elections—a mega-spectacle of its military power over the region. For the initial six

years of the armed movement, Kashmir was governed through direct rule from New Delhi, locally called “Governor Raj.” In 1996 elections were held that were unsurprisingly fixed, rigged, and coercive, with a massive presence of government troops.¹⁷ Subsequent elections have been irregular, tedious, and complex, and the presence of government troops is disproportionate and impedes public movement through patrols and curfews (Navlakha 2009). In the 2014 elections, in addition to the existing military force, an additional 56,500 troops from India were sought to control the election process (see “J&K Seeks 56,500 Security Force Personnel” 2014). The army and police are often accused of placing restrictions on people and forcing them to vote (see Bose 2004; Junaid 2013b).

The elections are systematically boycotted by Muslim Kashmiris, partly due to a ban by resistance leaders and militant outfits but also because rigged voting is seen as weak compensation for self-determination. The documented turnout in Srinagar has been as low as 10 percent (Constable 2004). In 2017, following an uprising, voter turnout went down to a mere 7 percent and 2 percent in the elections. Most of my research partners had never voted, and those who did said that they voted for “bijli, sadak, pani [electricity, roads, and water]” (also see Mukherjee 2008). The Kashmiri opinion leaders I interviewed all agreed that two distinct categories of politics exist in Kashmir: one pertains to day-to-day governance, and another to the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. Thus people vote for civil governance. It is not an indication of giving up their demands for self-determination and certainly is not an endorsement of the accession to India.

THE ARMED STRUGGLE OF 1989

Under the rubric of the Tehreek, the armed resistance is called Askari Tehreek, meaning “armed movement.” This was led by the pioneer organization Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). Although the outfit started in 1964, it resorted to armed militancy only in the late 1980s. JKLF believes in a sovereign Kashmir, independent from both India and Pakistan. Still in existence, the group gave up arms in 1994 and works as a

political movement. The second most influential group is the Hizbul Mujahidin (HM), which was co-founded by Ahsan Dar, a Kashmiri teacher. HM is dominantly pro-Pakistan and continues to fight in Kashmir. In the 1990s the armed groups numbered anywhere between 44 and 140, with differing goals of joining Pakistan or independence, but all are anti-India. The armed uprising was bolstered by civilian support. Public displays of unity with the militants popularly called Mujahids (“strivers” in Arabic), who were perceived to be fighting a jihad, were rampant.¹⁸

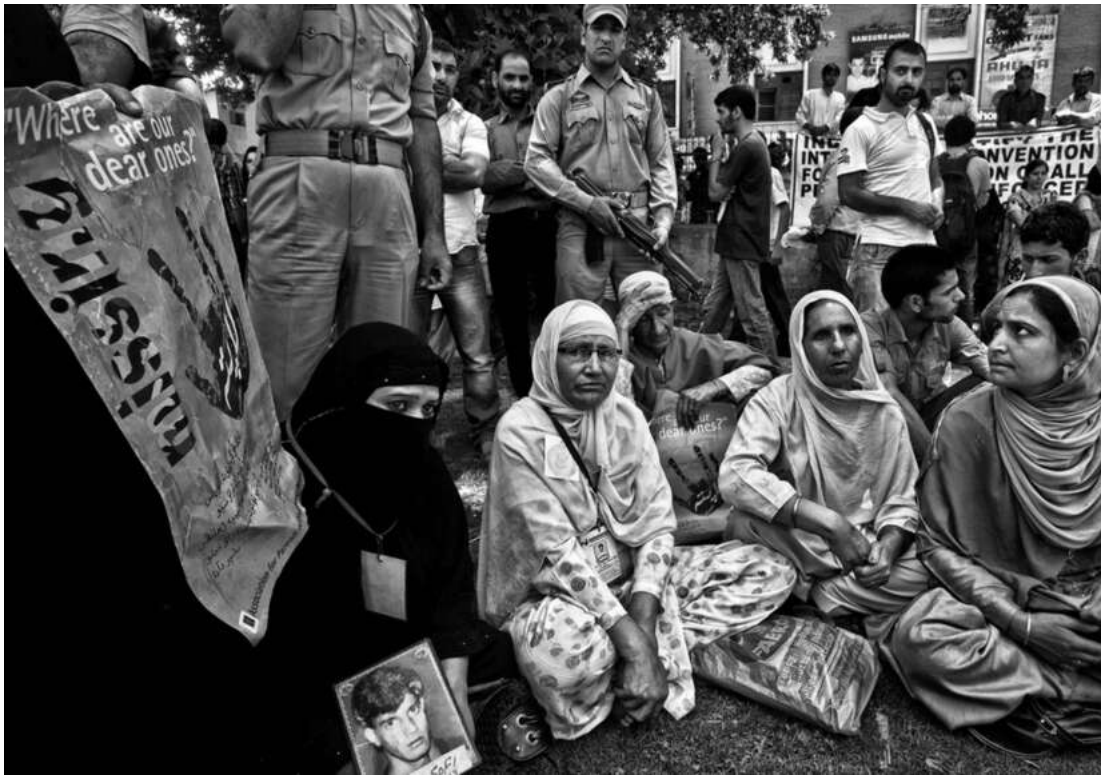
People participated in protest marches organized in support of the Tehreek, release of political prisoners, and denouncements of human rights abuses by the Indian forces (Hajni 2008). Women sang songs cheering the militants, and when they were killed in combat, their funerals were massive. Their burials took place in cemeteries designated as Mazar-e-Shuhada (Martyrs Graveyard) (Junaid 2018). Kashmiris also resurrected the long sidelined United Nations as an icon of their aspirations of self-determination and a plebiscite. Massive rallies, at one point “a 400,000 strong crowd, marched to the UN headquarters in Srinagar to hand over memoranda demanding [a] plebiscite” (Schofield 2004: 150).

Most Kashmiris believed that the revolution would be short (Human Rights Watch 2006). But the 1990s wore on without the Tehreek getting closer to any culmination. In the early 1990s the Kashmiri Hindus, known as the Pandits (a 100,000- to 140,000-strong community), migrated en masse from Kashmir to Jammu, Delhi, and other places. Most Pandits, barring some exceptions, have always supported Indian rule. In an atmosphere of distrust and fear, the militants selectively killed prominent Kashmiri personalities who supported India, from both the Muslim and Pandit communities (Bose 1998; Evans 2002). Scholars have noted that the selective killings by the militants were based on politics and not religion (Bose 1998: 74; Hassan 2010: 10), but many Pandits accused the Tehreek of being communal. Muslims blame the political violence and the perception of fear, which was amplified by the government that facilitated the migration (Mohan et al. 1990). Counterinsurgency policies intensified,

leading to several back-to-back massacres just as Pandits left (Schofield 1996: 246; Donthi 2016). Kashmir became a battlefield. The Indian forces established bunkers and checkpoints everywhere, and combing operations and patrolling became usual affairs. The implementation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) resulted in high numbers of killings, disappearances, raids, and rapes, affecting both combatants and noncombatants (see Mishra 2012).

By 2000 the armed militancy had abated to a large extent. According to the Indian administration's own estimates, the number of militants had dropped to fewer than five hundred, yet the counterinsurgency policies continued with full force. From 2008 on, the Kashmiri resistance morphed into a culture of increased civil disobedience. The protestors banded together under slogans like "Quit Kashmir" and "Go India, Go Back." Pitched street battles known as *kani-jung* (stone battles), where factions of civilians—mostly youth known as *sang baaz* (stone-warriors)—fought the government troops. Thus a new phase of the Kashmiri Intifada (H. Khan 1990; Kak 2010) began, bolstered by street art, poetry, e-magazines, and graffiti—what scholars see as "civil society's indefatigable uprising for freedom" (Chatterji 2010: 133). *Hartal* (referring to a civil curfew), a long-standing means of protest used by Kashmiris, also intensified.¹⁹

Civilian uprisings have broken out over the past decade with a marked predictability. A recent uprising started in 2016, after Burhan Wani, a popular twenty-two-year-old militant, was killed in an encounter with Indian forces. In the protests that followed his killing, more than ninety-eight people were killed and over eleven thousand wounded (OHCHR 2018). India downplays the human rights violations, conveniently sidelining the Kashmiri political aspirations for sovereignty that can be traced back a century.



AUGUST IN KASHMIR

is a siege on steroids
India wrapped in saffron
Pakistan awash in green
Kashmir as always
soaks in blood
red of its old and young
those being born
and those not yet

CHAPTER 3

SPECTACULAR PROTEST

Pratap Park is a centrally located park in Srinagar. It is usually busy with people from all walks of life. On any given day, one can find old men sunning themselves, schoolboys loitering after cutting class, laborers eating lunch, and young lovers furtively holding hands behind the rose bushes, pretending to be invisible to the world. It is in this park that the women of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), chaired by Parveena Ahangar, hold their monthly protest.¹ The choice of this park is strategic—not only is it accessible to those coming from remote places but the media bureaus are in the vicinity. Parveena said of the venue: “People find it easy, and media can arrive in seconds, making it easier for them to cover our protests and convey our message.” The APDP activists agree that the park is an ideal venue. As Parveena said, “We come out to be seen and not to hide.”

The scene of an average protest has become very familiar across Kashmir and beyond, since local media as well as some international outlets have documented these protests extensively. At a protest in the fall of 2012, photojournalists duly appeared at the park as the APDP activists began to congregate. The activists sat in a circle, huddling close, surrounded by signage that spoke against the Indian state and its forces as perpetrators of enforced disappearances. A banner with a picture collage of disappeared men became an instant shrine in the corner. Most of the APDP activists wore black gowns and headbands displaying a profile of a disappeared person. Hung around their necks were pictures of their disappeared kin with his name and date of disappearance.

In pursuit of evocative shots, the photojournalists circled around the mourning activists, their elbows nudging into the cold winter earth, their hair falling over their eyes as they contorted their bodies to catch every crease and fold of the women's faces puckered in emotion. The smell of aftershave from the photographers mixed with the smell of burning coal from the *kanger* (hot coal braziers) that the red-faced, crying activists held close to their bodies, inside their traditional *pherans* (knee-length, loose winter gowns) to keep warm. The activists were not unnerved by the media activity around them; in fact, they seemed to expertly negotiate their way around it, conscious of what was required of them. They shifted sideways and forward, close and far, to accommodate the photographers' need for different angles and simultaneously answered questions from the journalists and offered words of comfort to each other.

The gathering crowd was a mix of local and a few foreign journalists, researchers, supporters, and curious bystanders. The activists did not seem to mind answering identical questions from different journalists. Their decades of experience in the APDP had made them professionals in disposition while the funereal demeanor prevailed. They repeated their answers word for word several times in a row, fatigue, seriousness, and purpose unmistakable on their faces. A contingent of policemen hovered around the scene. The APDP staffers had, as usual, obtained permission to hold the protest from the local police station beforehand. They usually have an hour or more to conduct their protests. Their time begins when the actual sit-in starts, which is not until all members arrive. It usually takes a long time to start because many members have to come from remote villages. In the initial years of the APDP there were arrests or altercations with police or paramilitary forces. Today, a predictable routine has been set, which the civil administration ignores, sporadically marked by some form of contestation with the police.

Since the early 1990s, by forming networks with international organizations, the APDP has grown in strength and visibility in human rights solidarity circles. Many students, researchers, filmmakers, journalists, and writers working on human rights come from outside Kashmir to

volunteer with the APDP groups. Despite these links, no information has been gained regarding the disappeared nor have the perpetrators been brought to justice. On the one hand, APDP has become a formidable front manifesting civilian resistance; on the other hand, one cannot help but see how the government subsumes such activism by negating the group's demands and refusing to acknowledge its cause. This treatment on the part of the Indian government appears similar to the deferral symbolized in Franz Kafka's *Before the Law* (1915), where the door to the law is open—and of course the APDP is allowed to protest and access the courts—but justice never arrives. Thus it seems that the government in Kashmir wants to appear democratic by allowing dissent, even though it is heavily controlled, curtailed, and surveilled under the military occupation.

AFFECTIVE POLITICS

The women made small talk until the actual sit-in began. Their conversations ranged from discussions of the progress of their court cases to inquiries about weddings, funerals, betrothals, sickness, and other family affairs. Over the years the APDP activists have formed friendships on which they depend, especially with Parveena. Most senior APDP members are often referred to by names affixed with epithets as a mark of respect and intimacy. Parveena is *jiji* (aunt) to most, while the other elderly ladies are referred to as *mouji* (mother) or *dedi* (another name for “grandmother” or sometimes “mother”), or *maas* (maternal aunt); the younger women are called *didi* (“elder sister” in Urdu). As the sit-in began, the women arranged themselves in a formal group, displaying photographs of the disappeared. Many children who took part in the protest sat side by side with the activists with familiar ease. After a few moments, the silence gave way to a resounding lamentation. Suddenly the park became a funeral site, with Parveena as its focal point. Standing, she addressed the activists. Her voice heavy with grief and ire, she said:

We stand for the disappeared. Our loved ones have been kidnapped and disappeared, but my *saethi* [comrades], my sisters, and I are here. We appear here in public for them [the

disappeared]; we are before the world, shouting at the top of our lungs, “Return my son! Return all our sons! Return the husbands, fathers—return them all!” Hindustan cannot hide it for too long from the world that it has disappeared our loved ones deliberately. They were *begunah* [innocent]. We have papers to prove our cases.²

After this brief exhortation, Parveena sang a folkloric elegy: “Where have you blossomed, my rose?” The women join in the chorus. Mogal Maas (mentioned in chapter 1) would at times sing a popular evocation: “I will rock you, my darling. Where did you hide my crescent moon?”³

The scene of the protest became replete with songs, eulogies, and weeping. In this scenario it is not uncommon for some women to faint from stress and exhaustion. Rehat, whose son had been forcibly disappeared going on eighteen years ago, would often faint at these protests. As a sufferer of hypertension, she had been advised to avoid stressful situations, but she insisted on being present at the protest. “I have to be here for my son. I want to tell India what they have done to me, to us; this is my life now, this tension, and anxiety. Waiting has become my fate; India is responsible for my ruin. My son’s loss haunts me, the world needs to see what happens to me, my body, and my family, my grandchildren, my daughter-in-law.” Rehat insisted on bringing her granddaughter and grandson to the protest, but she did not allow her daughter-in-law, Maimoona, to become active in the APDP. Rehat explained that it is a tough role for a young woman whose husband has disappeared. As an older woman, Rehat said she has *hath hisaab* (one hundred remedies or ways of escape), as compared to a younger woman, who will have to face the brutal eyes of men. Her relatives would raise eyebrows, she said, and as a mother-in-law she could not allow that to happen. About her grandchildren in attendance, Rehat said: “They are young. They don’t remember their father . . . this protest is their father now; this is how they see him every month. . . . I cannot deny them this. We have to keep him alive and remind Hindustan that we have not forgotten anything.”⁴

The APDP activists fully recognize how crucial media are to their struggle and how they amplify their message. They make sure every meaningful nuance of the struggle is documented. For example, when a new

member broke down after spotting her husband's picture in the collage that had been installed in the corner, Zooneh brought it to the attention of a journalist. She said to him: "Come check for yourself! Write about her. She has spotted her husband's picture for the first time; see, he has been disappeared afresh today. Tell those tyrants we won't forget. We die every day, little by little, in this grief." Since the monthly sit-in has become pivotal to the movement, most journalists from Kashmir and outside plan their reportage on the day of the protest.

I saw an Italian journalist, who had little fluency in English, interviewing Parveena. Several levels of translations were in progress in this interaction. The journalist asked Parveena questions that had been written down in Italian on a sheet of paper. The journalist was painstakingly forming her questions in broken English. An APDP volunteer was translating the questions into Kashmiri for Parveena. Parveena was answering in Kashmiri and a smattering of Urdu. Her answers were translated back for the journalist, who had trouble discerning the APDP volunteer's English pronunciation as well as the meaning of a few English words, which I provided an explanation for. Conveying and receiving the message became a collective effort. During the interview Parveena wept copiously, which clearly did not need any interpretation. Zooneh and a few other women sat close by and occasionally leaned sideways to wipe away Parveena's tears and whisper words of comfort while they themselves wept. Azi, sitting close to Zooneh, repeated: "Marun chu akh godh; rawun ne kenh [Dying is a tragedy (lacunae created) once, but not the disappearance]." Parveena narrated her story to the journalist, word for word, the same as she has told me, and told to countless media persons, researchers, and filmmakers. ⁵

THE SPECTACLE OF THE ACTIVIST

Even when the punishment of enforced disappearance is focused on the total annihilation of the person and creates a threatening void, the disappearance ceases to be hushed up. The disappearance appears as a

counter-spectacle through the women's performative activism. In this politics of visibility, the motif of performance (or performativity) becomes important as a metaphor through which women's activism unfolds, takes shape, and concretizes socially and politically.⁶ At the heart of the performative politics of the activists is the notion of *asal zanan*. *Asal* in Kashmiri means "good" and *zanan* means "woman." In its overarching connotations, the Kashmiri phrase *asal zanan* will find resonance across most cultures globally, where women as a category are often constrained to being modest, obedient, caring, responsible, passive, and often inferior to men.

The emphasis of being an *asal zanan* is on the merits of being "discreet" or, in more basic terms, of not being seen. Ironically, the work of APDP activists goes against the notion of "not being seen or heard," for it entails seeking heightened visibility in public. In the context of gender, Judith Butler (1990: 520) has explained that it is a "performative accomplishment, which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief." I argue that the APDP activists perform the role of *asal zanan* activists by utilizing and improvising on culturally amenable (i.e., feminine) acts that are seen as ideal. While creating an acceptable activist persona, this strategy simultaneously repairs the damage that visibility in public can inflict on their status as *asal zanan*. The APDP activists attain a public identity while retaining the status of *asal zanan*. While they make the disappeared visible, they also sustain social invisibility, inflicted by their gender being secondary as in any other patriarchal tradition.

The emergence of the Muslim female APDP activist is based on an affective politics of mourning. The women use socially accepted subject-positions—that of a mother, wife, or daughter—to customize an activist identity, which becomes part of the counterspectacle to the spectacle of enforced disappearances. From the perspective of Foucauldian micropolitics, the counter-spectacle is a form of resistance that has the potential not only to challenge normalized subjectivities but also to become agential (Foucault 1980a, 1980b). To illustrate the emergence of the APDP

activist, I use Parveena's rendition of her struggle of searching for her son and the account of the life events and activism of a half-widow named Sadaf Khan. Through the lens of discourse politics, which is an aspect of Foucauldian micropolitics (Best and Kellner 1991: 58), I trace how gendered resistance is framed, activated, and operationalized in Parveena's narrative about the genesis and evolution of her activism.

PARVEENA AHANGAR'S ACCOUNT

Here, I reproduce verbatim the account Parveena gave to a journalist. She has similarly recounted this to me and many others, who have asked her to trace her journey as an activist.

I have been telling this story for more than two decades. You can read it anywhere. You can go and confirm? Many foreign people [media] have interviewed me . . . but I know how important it is to tell you again. I do not tire of it. I remember that time [when her son disappeared] like last night's dinner; I see it clearly. It was 1994. Everyone went to bed. I checked the doors and windows again. Our curtains smelled like firecrackers. In our neighborhood we would have frequent grenade blasts; the smoke was like our daily incense; sometimes, as many as three to four blasts would occur. Bunkers came up in our neighborhood; soldiers were intensely patrolling the streets. There was daily "action" [cross fire between soldiers and militants]; boys were being arrested, *dharnas*, demonstrations, and crackdowns were a routine part of our life—it was a battle zone. My son, Phamba [her fond name for her disappeared son], had an exam. He could not study in the chaos, so he went for an overnight stay at his uncle's. He wanted to study without any interruptions.

For some reason, I felt restless that night. I tried to sleep. I fell asleep for a few minutes but I woke up startled; my brother's voice was calling frantically, "Jiji [sister] Jiji," he yelled. "Your son has been taken away by the soldiers." I opened the door; my brother was red in the face, clothes torn. The soldiers had beaten him when he tried to stop them from kidnapping my son.

My gentle lamb-like boy, he would help me with household chores like a dutiful daughter; he had been taken away in the middle of the night.⁷ He had been dragged away by the hair, near naked, in an undershirt. The soldiers had begun beating him right away. The army had mistaken him for another man of the same name, in the neighborhood. My friend, who was watching the entire scene from her attic, said Phamba was shouting he was innocent. The soldiers dragged him out from the alley, beating him. He had been calling me, crying out, "Jiji Jiji, save me; I have done nothing wrong."⁸

How can I sit at home and forget him? I have other children, but he was not a toy, which you forget if it gets lost. I gave birth to him; he is my flesh and blood. He is a human being; he needs to be searched for. I know the name of the regiment and the officer that kidnapped

him. I have filed a case against them, although it has been languishing for more than two decades. I will not yield till I see them behind bars.

Between pauses, Parveena repeatedly urged the volunteer who was translating:

Tell her [the Italian journalist], I have said this before to many media people; she should read those interviews. It's out there in writing. She can also see my documents; I have complete files of my case, which I can show her. She [the journalist] will see for herself how cruelly we have been treated; we are on the path of truth, we have become *shisterr* [iron]; no one can break us.

Even though Parveena and other APDP activists want to tell their stories to as many people as possible, there was a sense of frustration at having to repeat it over and over. From time to time, Parveena was burdened by the repetition, but she soldiered on. The references she made to her other interviews and documentation were not to avert answers but to indicate the veracity of her story and the long-standing credence her activism has gained in the regional and international media as well as in public justice forums.

As Parveena's interview progressed, a young, bearded policeman holding a baton, with a rifle carelessly slung over his shoulder, came over to where Parveena sat. He murmured that they should wind up the protest. The young policeman was part of a contingent of six or seven armed men who had been patrolling the venue. A group of young boys, probably skipping school, hung around nearby. One of them wondered aloud: "Do they wear the black gowns during this time [protest]." Another boy answered: "They are black protest clothes." A middle-aged man close by pursed his lips and, turning to me, whispered: "What can be achieved by these women?" Without waiting for my response, he added: "Bechari zanan [poor women], what can they do? Weak and powerless. Every month they come, shed tears, beat their chests, but they cannot change the heart of a single person in power. India is a big country; they won't leave Kashmir alone. They do everything to repress us. What can a bunch of women do? We all have been looted." Eyes moist, the man watched the women and clicked his tongue ruefully.

The crowd in the park began to thin. The policeman approached Parveena and, without meeting her eyes, visibly awkward and humbled by her, he said to no one in particular: “Time is up. It cannot go on this long.” He dashed toward his colleagues, who were listlessly looking in the direction of the protestors. After a few minutes they all returned with the younger bearded one, and told the activists: “Time is up; please finish fast.” Parveena, who by then was ending her interview, replied: “We have to answer the same God, or are you answering a different God, my son? Why do you bother us? Am I not your mother? Those disappeared, are they not your brothers?” The policeman answered her: “My apologies, Mouji [mother], but I am on duty; I have many bosses who will suspend me. All I can do is to ask you to finish within your time. I have no control beyond that; I am just a servant of the government.”

Parveena turned to the Italian journalist and gestured with resignation. “He is also a Kashmiri,” she said, “but he has his work, we have ours; he does his part, and we do ours. This is what God ordained.” Soon after, the APDP volunteers cleared away the signage and other traces of the protest. The black garments and headbands were stuffed into a box. The women put the laminated photographs back into the ubiquitous plastic bags in which they carry the documents pertaining to their cases. Almost every APDP activist carries such a bag of documents. When the journalist asked Parveena if she needed to leave immediately, she said: “Now the signs are gone. We are dispersed. They don’t care. We could be ordinary women sitting here, but we will leave soon. We don’t have time to sit around; there is so much to do.” As the protest paraphernalia disappeared from the scene and the women began trickling out of the park, the policemen also vanished. Some photographers lingered, their shutters clicking, until the women disappeared into the crowd on the street.

MATERNAL SURVEILLANCE

In the early 1990s, Parveena was a simple homemaker with little formal education. After her son Javaid was taken into custody by Indian forces,

Parveena was thrown into an unfamiliar world of searching for him. Initially she followed the same routine that countless Kashmiris undertake when someone is arrested or goes missing—scouring jails, police stations, and army camps. Gradually, while pursuing the court case and doing the rounds of government offices, Parveena met parents and families in similar situations. Of the early days, she said: “We would be waiting together for hours on end, outside courts, jails, and slowly we began to search together. Then we started meeting regularly at my home.” In 1994 she cofounded the APDP with human rights lawyer Parvez Imroz, who worked pro bono. He currently heads the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), the umbrella human rights group under which the other APDP group organizes. Parvez became Parveena’s close confidant, and as Parveena recalled, they did a *khoda-rasool* —a way of relation-making where two or more people might pledge allegiance to each other in the spiritual witness of Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him. Generally, this pledge is made to settle disputes or recognize nonsexual bonds between persons of the opposite sex. Such an avowal must have helped protect Parveena and Parvez’s working relationship from unnecessary social criticism.

Parveena’s rendition of the events around her son’s disappearance illuminates her performative politics and her gendered activist identity based on the ideal of an *asal zanan* . While this ideal enables the figure of the activist to appear in the public sphere, it also underlines the social invisibility that women continue to face.⁹ Parveena’s narrative about the early days of struggle, the formation of the APDP, and her subsequent high-profile activism is exemplary because it traces the discursive politics in which she is engaged to construct an activist identity. This is an English translation of Parveena’s account from Kashmiri:

After the soldiers took Javaid, his voice kept ringing in my ears. My friend told me she had heard shouting. I keep hearing his cries for help. When the sun rose that morning, I was not the same woman; I was *badlliyy* [different]. When I left home to search for him, I was not the woman from the day before. *Me gondh kamar . . . be drayas jangas*. I braced myself; my body had entered a battlefield. I became *shisterr* [iron]. Nothing could bend me—not even my

other kids, who needed me badly, or my husband, who said I was neglecting our home. He would threaten to divorce me if I did not stop searching and stay at home to take care of the kids. I left my other kids to God. I was not even around to support them through school. My daughter was too young, and my neighbors would babysit her while I went out to search for Phamba. This affected my children.

My husband would taunt me, saying what I was doing was not expected of an *asal zanan* [good woman]. My relatives would turn their faces the other way when they saw me sitting in the protest—sometimes they would say I was *pagal* [crazy]; sometimes they would accuse me of becoming a loose woman. But I did not care. I am a mother. A mother is a mother; how could I just let go? What rules can a mother follow when her son has been stolen from her? If someone loses an earring, won't they search for it? Why is going crazy looking for a measly earring okay, but when you lose a son, how can you just sit back? I had to ignore the taunting voices and go out.

When I look in the mirror, a miserable mother looks back at me—one who is pining for her son. The old me, the way I was before my son disappeared, is vague; she is *nesf-nuhnawneh* [half-erased]. I used to laugh and make others laugh. I was *zindeh-dil* [bravehearted, feisty, or fun-loving], but now I am not that woman anymore; I have changed. My pain was too great. I left the home and hearth, which had given me happiness. Earlier, I had been most satisfied when I was at home cooking and cleaning, but after Phamba disappeared, I gave up that joy; it did not hold any meaning. My dreams of a new house, children's education, and their marriages were all gone. How can I live normally when I still feel he is out there waiting for me? I get panic attacks. I keep watching the door, even if it's the wind, thinking it is him knocking. How can I forget him? Sometimes, even if I am sitting in the midst of a noisy wedding, I hear my son's voice calling me.

I get nightmares about him being tortured by the soldiers and calling for my help. I wake up yelling, trying to answer him. Initially, I would wake up the whole household and they would get angry at me. I was unable to sleep for many years. A friend of my older son, who is a singer, would stay with us for nights, thinking his songs would comfort me. Instead his songs would torment me, and we would all end up weeping. Nothing helped me—no prayer, no faith healers. The only thing that gave me relief was to go out and search for him from jail to jail, court to court.

I had to make a *buth* [face]; otherwise, people would not let me do anything. I am a mother. How can a mother sit back? A mother is a mother. You tell me; you are a mother too? A good mother cannot let go of the responsibility of keeping her children safe. If I am not a good mother, how can I be a good woman? I am not a father. A father is a man. A man can erase feelings like one cleans one's behind in the bathroom. But I am a mother; I cannot do that. I had to make a *buth* and continue my search. I stopped wearing a burkha; I bared my face. I was not the same woman; I became *sanglaat* [hard like stone]. I sat in the streets. I chased after army officers and politicians—anyone, everyone who I thought had the power to help me find my son. People called me *metch* [crazy]. Yes, I am *metch*; how can I be sane? Even God will forgive me for this kind of craziness. I am a mother; I gave birth to my son. My heart has been gutted out. The Indian government has wounded my womb; they have scarred me. I do not care if my hair or face is showing. Tell me, did the pious Lal Ded stay inside to search for her God?¹⁰ No, she roamed the streets naked. And I am a *metch*, too, searching for my son. He was God's gift. I have no shame to search for my son with my face exposed.

I would have stayed inside the four walls of my home with joy, but the pain of losing a child has dragged me out into the streets. These soldiers, they will know one day what it is to forcibly disappear people; they too will suffer, so will India, when it leaves Kashmir with its tail between its legs, defeated. God's justice is invisible, and it will come. Now, see, I am not alone; we are hundreds of women and thousands of families, all united, and we have more people supporting us now. We won't cower down, not anymore. *Aseh che kaem Karin* [We have to continue the work].

Parveena's narrative is crucial for tracing how she has built her activist-self on established social categories. She begins by saying that in the wake of her son's disappearance, she changed; she became "vague," "half-erased." Here, she establishes her transformation by partial erasure into *shisterr* (iron). The use of the Kashmiri term *shisterr* as a figure of speech denotes extraordinary strength shown by a person in the face of adversity, or it can even mean a hardened attitude. Parveena denotes her transformation from a woman—a flesh-and-blood person who was a sheltered homemaker—into a *shisterr*. She establishes the change that takes place in her not only to indicate the extraordinary emotional and physical resources she has had to generate to search for her son but also the way she has transformed from a woman who is supposed to maintain a private role to one who has been pushed into the public sphere. She indicates that she entered a battle. These transformations are pivotal in justifying her public persona, grounded in the ethics of an *asal zanan*.

Parveena says that she only sees a "pining mother" in the mirror, underlining that she does not see the "woman" society expects her to be and that she had to make *buth* ("face" in Kashmiri). The word *buth* can also be used in various ways to convey adopting a mask-like look denoting a change of attitude, becoming confrontational, rude, or cold. Often "making/doing" *buth* can mean being nasty or reprimanding. A face, when used in the context of wearing or making, may suggest that a person is behaving contrary to expectations or exhibiting dramatic, confrontational behavior. Parveena's invoking of *buth* indicates that she adopted a stern, unrelenting public face or persona. Her making of *buth* flags the moment as symbolic of the visibility she has gained as an activist, the partial erasure ("becomes vague") of her earlier self that she has suffered; now she is a

palimpsest. Parveena's identity as an *asal zanan* is retained while the activist identity is inscribed upon it. Beneath the motif of *asal zanan*, she establishes her maternal worth, where being a "good" mother is grounded in finding her child. It is in this context that Parveena inhabits the public space.

Parveena also invokes the traditional trope of a *metch* to indicate her altered state of mental and physical being. A *metch* (the masculine category is known as a *motth*) in Kashmiri culture is used to define two categories of women: either ordinary ones who have lost mental balance due to some routine reason or special ones who often are ambulatory diviners, mystics, or seers. A *metch* or *motth* is traditionally seen as outside the normal social conventions. A *metch*, like a *motth*, especially is one who might be perceived as a mystic-seer who renounces society and takes to wandering among the people or in the wilderness. Historically, the tradition of the *metch* and *motth* in Kashmir has a well-regarded status, and many men and women of this category are immortalized as saints, seen as not constrained by their earthly gendered bodies. They are perceived to be *Fana fiAllah* (those who have annihilated the self into Allah), to whom people turn for supplications. A *metch* may behave with gentleness, or she might be given to swearing, cursing, and even beating people (behavior which would not be held against her). Many times the recipients of such behavior from the *metch*, both men and women, consider this to be a portent of good fortune and healing.

Kashmiri folklore is replete with instances of *metch* who renounced worldly connections, including giving up all social norms (even wearing clothes). Even their nudity did not deter the reverence people showed them. In the hierarchy of different mystic orders, revered both by Muslims and Hindu Pandits, *metch* are believed to hold a specific status and are known to be free from the bonds of propriety and culture and unified with *baatin* (the realm of the spirit, unseen/invisible, alluding to the divine). By identifying herself as a *metch*, Parveena relieves herself of the social propriety that comes with being an ordinary woman. As a *metch*, she rises above her femaleness and the social critique around being relentlessly visible in

public. She uses cultural motifs to construct an ambient activist identity that rises above the social norms, enabling her to combat the fatal contingencies of military occupation. Through discursive politics, she establishes an activist identity. Within the performative trifold of *metch* , *shisterr* / *sanglat* , and *buth* , she achieves transformation and elevation from being “just a woman.”

As a Butlerian speech act (1993), Parveena’s discursive performance enacts and produces her self on an amalgam of the available and acceptable social idioms. This identity becomes unique in its social subversion while borrowing heavily from what Parveena perceives as socially amenable. She concludes her narrative by saying she has to continue the *kaem* (work). Parveena often invokes *kaem* , which includes not just searching for the disappeared men but taking care of the families of the activists. She often refers to herself as a *pohul* (shepherd) and calls the APDP membership a *jab* (flock) that she must not only lead but also look after. While the APDP tries to support deserving members through monthly provisions, medical and legal clinics, and medicines, Parveena is often engaged in fund-raising for weddings, tuitions, and treatments for the families of the APDP activists. Visiting sick members, she takes meals and fruits especially if she knows the member is in need. This ethos of maternal care is pivotal in how Parveena organizes as the APDP chairperson, thus shaping an intimate activism.

Parveena’s narrative reiterates motherhood as an established, undisputed category that is a mark of a good woman and that lifts her above the vulnerabilities of her femaleness. Foregrounding herself as both a mother and a *metch* , she is beyond gender but heavily imbued with maternal aspects that she invokes through the historical figure of Lal Ded. Lala Arifa was a medieval poetess-mystic born into a Hindu home and is popularly called Lala Mouj or Ded (*Mouj* means mother and *Ded* is a term for grandmother). Both Muslim and Pandit Kashmiris herald her as the spiritual mother of Shiekh Noor-u-Din Wali or Nund Ryesh, a Muslim poet-mystic who is widely regarded as the patron saint of Kashmir. A mystic of the highest order, Lala is known to have roamed naked, uncaring of social

propriety, professing that she was seeking God. By invoking Lal Ded's legacy, Parveena ensures that maternal affect permeates her assumed behavioral codes as an activist. She conveys that her maternal ethics seized her, so she roams in public seeking her son. She thus retains the mantle of *asal zanan* by establishing herself essentially as a good mother who cannot forgo her child at any cost and transcends all gendered constraints in the process.

Parveena also talks specifically about how she gave up wearing the burkha when she began searching for her son. This is paradoxical. A burkha is a knee-length cape with a face veil, worn by observant Muslim women. It signifies piety and segregation from the opposite sex. The disappearance of Parveena's son forced her to step out of her home and initiate contact with all that was previously anathema to her, especially the traditional masculine domain of the courts, army, and police. She explains the event of giving up the burkha: "What was the use of such modesty when I deliberately had to seek meeting the most brutal of men: army, police, politicians . . .? I did not have the luxury of remaining shy and protected." On a superficial level, her abandonment of the burkha may be understood as a routine transgression of her previous social behavior or even simple frustration about wearing extra layers while running between jails and courts. But Parveena offered more insight into why she gave up the burkha: "When Javaid disappeared, I lost sense of myself; I did not know who I was. I was numb; I could have been a doll made of human flesh. I lost sense of who was a man or who was a woman, and who I was. I did not care. I was a *metch* on the street searching for my son; how would I care what I looked like or what people saw? I just stopped caring for everything I saw."

Parveena expressed a nonchalant attitude about how she dresses or how people view her appearance. By virtue of being a *metch* and a mother, she indicates her rise above the category of being just a woman. Even as she is directed by an evolved purpose of fighting for justice, she still makes sure that her hair is carefully covered under a long scarf and presents herself in the most modest and age-appropriate manner.

THE SPECTACLE OF A GOOD HALF-WIDOW

Sadaf Khan is a half-widow whose husband was disappeared by Indian troops. I trace Sadaf's everyday agency and resistance amid the occupation of her homeland, deploying the biopolitical aspect (Best and Kellner 1991: 58) of the Foucauldian paradigm of micropolitics (Foucault 1980a, 1980b) to illustrate her attempts to break from the grip of disciplinary powers and reinvent herself while negotiating social and political constraints. Along the way, Sadaf's female consciousness evolves to sustain her activism and daily life. When I first met Sadaf at her home, she was dressed very differently than how she presented herself in the public sphere. At home, she was a vision of youthful femininity in a flowery red dress, with a long, matching scarf tied around her neck. With her flowing, long, hennaed hair, which I had never seen uncovered, she reminded me of a movie star. As Sadaf got ready to leave her house, she transformed from a vision of youth to premature dowdiness—the persona I was accustomed to seeing outside.

As part of her transformation, Sadaf wore a loose tunic in pale chintz—a distinctive style associated with older Kashmiri women. She covered her hair with a black hijab (fitted scarf) and a patterned shawl, completing her look with black shoes that completely enclosed her feet. The only parts of her that remained visible were the small triangle of her face and her two hands; the rest of her body was purposefully hidden beneath layers. Feminist theory testifies to the fact that even when women may be socially and hierarchically invisible, as a sex category, they are “hyper-visible” (hooks 2000). It appeared to me that Sadaf was diminishing her feminine allure. For the kind of beauty she possessed, Sadaf almost “de-womanized” herself to appear plain. By the same token, she heightened her modesty by projecting a look of piety often associated with strictly observant Muslim women in Kashmir. Through careful and strategic layering, she was attempting to divert attention from her youthful sexuality and forge the appearance of an *asal zanan*—one “not seen.” Her image as an *asal zanan* is a performative accomplishment that sustains her activism against the

oppressive regime and simultaneously enables her to undo the damage public visibility can inflict on her female status in society.¹¹

Sadaf and her husband, Manzoor, had been extremely close as a couple. They had fallen in love in high school and married against the wishes of their parents. They eloped and ended up living and working in New Delhi. Sadaf grew misty-eyed recalling that Manzoor had been an ideal husband who not only “loved to see me dolled up” but supported “my *shauq*” (passions/ hobbies). After the birth of their children, Manzoor bought Sadaf dresses and matching lipstick to wear when she returned home from the hospital. He cooked her traditional postdelivery meals of *hand-te-maaaz* (mutton cooked in dandelion greens) to help her “regain strength.” Knowing her love of fashion and makeup, Manzoor even enrolled Sadaf in beauty classes. After their last child was born, they moved back to Kashmir (they had lived in Delhi), and within two years of their return, Manzoor was disappeared by the army.

Sadaf was clueless about what was to be done. The procedural intricacies, or lack thereof, in the courts, army camps, and police stations baffled her. “I had seen those places only on TV,” she recalled. “I had even forgotten how to write basic alphabets, and doing paperwork was almost impossible for me.” She hoped her travails were temporary. “I thought Manzoor would return as suddenly as he had disappeared,” she said. Manzoor’s presence hangs around Sadaf and her home like a heavy cloak. Grief and loss permeate everything in her life. She continues to make most decisions with him in mind: “What would he say?” is a deciding refrain. When she has a visitor, she habitually puts out an extra teacup, as if Manzoor will join at some point. This, she explained, assures her of Manzoor’s presence in her life. She even has a few of his shirts ready, as if he might return at any moment. She preserved his music collection, even though the old cassette tapes were no longer usable. While hoping she’ll find him alive, Sadaf urged her in-laws to give her a plot in their ancestral graveyard, where Manzoor had wanted to be buried. She wants to be prepared for any eventuality.

Sadaf's ritual of searching for Manzoor is a replica of the struggle of the kin of other disappeared men. She has made the rounds of government offices, army camps, police stations, interrogation centers, and almost all of the jails in Kashmir and some outside the region as well. In the initial years Sadaf frantically followed up on rumors about sightings of Manzoor. Based on such rumors, she visited jails and army camps in hopes of finding him. Thus far, however, all the government agencies have denied that Manzoor is detained. The few people who had seen him being arrested and had agreed to serve as witnesses in court did not come forward after the police and the army threatened them. For Sadaf, the court, police, civil, and army authorities became a rigmarole of paperwork, endless waiting, referrals, and misinformation.

To fund her search for Manzoor, Sadaf sold off most of her property. Initially a local *masjid* welfare committee helped her with the domestic expenses, but she eventually had to look for work. Her health began to deteriorate, and she often needed to be hospitalized for symptoms such as fainting or high blood pressure. The doctors prescribed an array of medicines. Every minor ache and pain would cause Sadaf to consult doctors and insist on more medication. She was ultimately diagnosed with depression, which she ritualistically experiences episodes of one to three times a year. During these times I find Sadaf lying in the dark on her makeshift bed on the floor. She surrounds herself with old photographs and her medications. Sadaf refers to these bouts of depression as systematic and necessary, saying that they "have to happen sometimes." Sadaf's response, like Zooneh's detailed in chapter 1, was reminiscent of hopeful melancholia because even during her worst depressive episodes, she talked about the future: the need to "recover fast" so that the "children would not suffer" and "[her] search must continue."

During these years Sadaf became increasingly superstitious. She recalled that her eye had been throbbing on the day when Manzoor disappeared. Now the frequent reoccurrence of this ocular symptom causes her to shut herself and the children inside the house for fear that they might also disappear. In tandem with her growing superstitions, Sadaf's religious

and spiritual fervor had increased. She continuously seeks spiritual interventions from Sufi shrines, saints, and all types of faith healers in her quest for Manzoor.

After Manzoor was disappeared, Sadaf received kindness and sympathy from her community. However, in time, constraints surrounding women without husbands in close-knit societies began to emerge. When Sadaf would dress the way she was used to, her friends and family would advise her to dress “appropriately.” Reminiscent of most South Asian cultures, widows in Kashmir are expected to maintain a low-key lifestyle and dress in a manner that is perceived as matching their bereaved status.¹² Hopeful for Manzoor’s return, Sadaf did not perceive herself as a “widow” and continued to dress in her youthful clothes. As per the prevalent Indian law, Sadaf would not be recognized as a widow until seven years after the disappearance; in the interim a half-widow cannot remarry or qualify for any government welfare plans. To counter the rising social problems of half-widows, ulemas (Islamic jurists) in Kashmir have shortened the duration of time until remarriage to four years. The duration, either four or seven years, implies the possibility of return, and the men are technically not considered dead.

Most half-widows in Kashmir, who roughly number between two thousand and twenty-five hundred, like Sadaf, maintain a strong hope that their husbands will return (Mathur 2016). A survey records that 91 percent of half-widows refuse to remarry (Dabla 2010, 2012). Even though remarriage is permitted and encouraged in Islam, persistent cultural taboos exist around it. Currently one of the biggest issues facing the half-widows is the right to the inheritance of their disappeared husbands. Although ulemas stepped in and passed an edict for half-widows to receive a share, in most cases it has not been a reality. Many of them are unskilled and depend on receiving the property rights of their disappeared husbands. For Sadaf, life as a half-widow and her continuous search for Manzoor makes her social status very precarious. She said:

I know, I should dress blandly and try not attract wrong attention from men. Even I too advise women like me to not be fashionable or draw attention to themselves; but the truth is even if we dress [as] dowdy women, more women like us who do not have their men around will be harassed. I know of a poor half-widow who is more than fifty years old. In the twenty years of her search, she has been molested thrice. A man, her neighbor, pretended to help her and forced himself upon her instead. Another it was a soldier and then an *ikhwanee* [government militant appropriated to fight insurgency], who also began harassing her daughter. He would show up at their door in the night. She had to flee her husband's house after that and now lives with her brother. If you see her, she is not attractive and does not dress well at all. She looks older beyond her years, like someone's grandmother, but still the lecherous men took advantage of her. She has kept all this buried in her chest and has never opened her mouth to anyone but me. What will you say to that?

Sadaf herself has suffered sexual harassment, at the hands of a particular *ikhwanee*. He began stalking Sadaf and demanded sexual favors from her in exchange for information about Manzoor. When she declined, he detained Sadaf's sons and harassed her relatives. Later, he even proposed marriage, which Sadaf perceived as a tactic to seduce her. Her friends and family advised her to give up searching for Manzoor, which would stop her encountering *badmaash mard* (debauched men), and thus she could stay *asal paeth* (in a good way). The fear of danger to Sadaf's life was real. In June 2003, Dilshada Bano, who was active in searching for her husband (who disappeared in custody) was assassinated by unidentified gunmen. In a war zone, vulnerable and frantically mobile women like Dilshada, looking for some help, are often "suspected of having links with army or militants and often both sides view her with suspicion" (Jeelani 2003). A few days before her killing, Dilshada had confided in someone that the renegade militiamen were forcing her to become an informer for the army and she was resisting.

The disappearance of Manzoor made Sadaf hypervisible because she was not a routine widow. Her course as a half-widow was uncharted in a socio-political maze. Sadaf was part-husbanded and part-bereaved, and the possibility of being either in totality was real. She did not have the luxury of mourning within her home because no one had yet died and there was not yet a body, which she wanted to find regardless of its condition. Her unending mourning—fueled by love, unanswered questions, and hauntings

— forced her to go out in search every single day. “Suddenly everyone became my ‘husband’; not just my relatives,” she said, “even the soldiers and cops told me what to do.” Used in this manner, the word “husband” connotes authority. Even though the social and political forces lay claim to Sadaf without offering any solution, she did not abandon her pursuit.

In an attempt to enhance her modesty and thwart preying men, Sadaf began to wear a burkha. She had wanted to attain a strict look of piety, but she did not recall that the burkha was also notorious for providing anonymity to women for pursuits as mundane as meeting a lover. In the 1990s women involved in dangerous work, such as being carriers or informants for militants (and even the army), also wore burkhas. Sadaf’s friends dissuaded her from wearing the burkha, saying that it was “dangerous,” since she could be mistaken for collaborating either with militants or the army and could therefore be risking her life. “I was trying my best to appear as the good wife I am,” she responded to this. “How can I rest inside my home when my *haq-i-khoday* [rightful possessor or a right divinely ordained or husband], my *haq* [my right; my husband] has been snatched from me?”

Sadaf abandoned the burkha and to maintain a modest, safe, and functional public appearance, she found a solution in wearing an abaya. This garment is a long, loose overall worn with a headscarf and an optional face veil donned in many Muslim countries. Many young Muslim women in Kashmir have adopted it. Sadaf found the abaya ideal because, as she put it, “it covered my body very well, [and] also I did not [have to] worry [about] what to wear underneath. It was modest and economical. It gave me a lot of freedom and saved me from prying eyes.” Even though she still wears the abaya, she recounted one instance where the dress provided no protection and became a source of danger because the flowing garment impeded her walking pace. In this instance, she had received permission to enter an army camp after hearing rumors that Manzoor might be detained there. In Kashmir army camps are viewed as terrifying places that represent humiliation, beatings, torture, rape, and killings. Of her visit to the camp, Sadaf recalled: “It was a long walk, [and] the CO’s office was in the middle

of a vast campus, very far. . . . The soldiers on guard were whistling at me; some hurled profanities.”¹³ Sadaf said that she tried picking up her pace but tripped several times over the long, billowing abaya, especially as it kept getting caught in the thorny bushes dotting the camp. At the end of the traumatic walk, she met the commanding officer, who told her they did *not* have Manzoor. The officer asked Sadaf to return the following week, however, as he might get some information about Manzoor’s whereabouts.

On her next visit, not wanting to trip over her abaya again, Sadaf chose to wear a *suthan*, which are like tights worn with a long tunic. She thought the *suthan* was snug enough to help her dart quickly across the dreaded camp. In her mind her choice of dress was about efficiency. Back at the camp, the CO had no information for her; instead, he offered a bag full of groceries and candy for her son, who had accompanied her. Taking her son along was a strategic decision for Sadaf. It was not only for the safety of company but also because, in her words, “with a child, [she appeared] more like a mother, and not just a young woman [even though the fear of safety would remain].” Sadaf brought her child along to reinforce the maternal aspect of her appearance. Early in the conversation, she realized that the CO had no intention of helping her find Manzoor; rather, he was eyeing her and convincing her to become an army informant. He talked about her financial situation and how he could help her place her children in a good school. He tried to give Sadaf a wad of cash and openly told her to visit him anytime. Sadaf was seething inside but kept quiet. “I mustered a ‘no’ somehow,” she recalls, “and ran back like a mad woman. It was scary.”

After this terrifying visit to the army camp, Sadaf had yet another experience to remind her of the social surveillance of her person in the community. Primarily out of concern for her reputation, her close friends politely admonished her for wearing the *suthan*. Even though most Kashmiri women wear this nontraditional garment, for Sadaf it was seen as a transgression. As a half-widow, she was expected to wear dowdy clothes. The *suthan* (called *kutneh* locally) is seen as a fashionable garment for its tightness. Steadily, Sadaf was being overwhelmed by the trivial speculations about her activities and appearance in her small community.

The attention of the *ikhwanee* was also getting out of control, as he was increasingly trying to meddle in her life.

After Sadaf joined the APDP, she finally got the courage to move to Srinagar, away from her extended family. Although she was a trained “esthetician,” she decided to teach embroidery instead, because being in the beauty trade was not considered *asal* (good). Even the older women in the APDP displayed their distaste for the beauty business, telling her “it invited sin by decorating women for the gaze of strangers” and that being in that business would brand her a “loose-charactered” woman. They advised Sadaf to “take up tailoring or make paper bags at home.” An interesting generational shift in social perceptions became clear as younger women in the APDP showed support for Sadaf’s work. Not only do they go to her for beauty treatments, they send her other clients as well. They recommend Sadaf for bridal makeup, which has become an indispensable part of Kashmiri weddings since 2008, earning her good money.

Today Sadaf runs her beauty business from home but still remains paranoid about revealing her vocation to men. She thinks being a beautician might undermine her *yezzath* (honor), or some men might take liberties with her. It is notable that although Sadaf goes to extreme lengths to hide her trade, many beauty clinics in Kashmir are owned by women from relatively wealthy families. Julie Peteet (1991: 6) has remarked: “How women experience the world around them is mediated by their class affiliation and the power that accrues from it.” Sadaf’s fear illustrates how for women, one’s class and social status become factors that impact how they claim and are perceived in a certain trade. As a semiliterate marginalized half-widow trying to make ends meet (unlike richer women in the same business), Sadaf is saddled more by the moral dictates burdening the profession rather than just its economic advantages, thus adding to her vulnerability.

Within the dictates of her social status, Sadaf cannot even lay claim to her natural beauty. She continues to enhance the modesty of her appearance and behavior by embodying the markers that an *asal zanan* is supposed to possess. She uses steroid ointments to tone down the natural rose in her cheeks, which has often been mistaken for rouge and by implication would

mean she wears makeup. Since Manzoor's disappearance, she has refrained from visiting a gynecologist, despite having debilitating menorrhagia. The notion of regular female wellness checkups is not common in Kashmir, and a gynecologist is seen primarily as one who takes care of pregnancies and sexual health issues. Sadaf does not want to visit a "lady doctor" and raise unnecessary suspicion that she is engaging in sexual activity.¹⁴

Conversely, Sadaf does not shy away from highlighting her depression and other stress-related conditions, for which she consults various doctors. The erosion of her health and frequent hospitalizations enhance her deprivations, which are seen as the hallmark of a pining wife—the good half-widow—which is not to suggest that her very real ailments are imaginary. The motifs associated with the *asal zanan* are made hypervisible and amplified, and her actions as a human rights activist, while carefully pursued, are not readily foregrounded in Sadaf's day-to-day interactions with people. Even though she is very talkative and can be argumentative in person, she avoids getting into confrontations or raising her voice in public, staying committed to appearing calm and demure. Yet she has become one of the leading voices of the APDP chaired by Parvez Imroz. Her name is at the forefront of many events and press releases issued to local and international media. This strange dichotomy illuminates the nuanced performance that Sadaf uses to appear as an *asal zanan* and an activist while simultaneously avoiding being branded as a *kharaab zanan* (bad woman).

Sadaf foregrounds the language of *haq* (rights), which within the APDP community appears as an admixture of women's rights in Islam and the framework of international human rights. "I cannot retreat from my activism because the government has snatched my *haq* (my right; my husband) as an *insaan* (human), *zanaan* (woman)," she says. "My husband is my human right." The language of human rights proliferates collectively within the APDP and individually within the lives of the activists. Sadaf's invocation illustrates how the international human rights framework interacts with the religious and cultural aspects of her life. In turn, she

garners legitimacy for her activism by bringing it on par with the rights Islam gives women.

Sadaf's politics of visibility as a half-widow is layered and can be read as an aboveboard response to the Indian military occupation. In this, she and her female counterparts surpass even the male human rights activists, whose mode of working is less demonstrative publicly. Her activism appears to visibly conform to the requirements of the Kashmiri patriarchal structure, which itself is a besieged structure that is intensely complicated and compromised by the hegemony of the Indian military regime through direct and indirect forms of violence. Even though the contemporary Kashmiri patriarchy has not been theoretically studied in the context of militarization, historically it has been largely a "working-class patriarchy" that was also compromised under centuries of tyrannical rules. Since 1989, extreme discrimination toward Kashmiris of all genders has been renewed in the heavily securitized state. The validity of the assumption that men are the protectors is often brought into question in the context of the zones of violence (Aretxaga 1997; De Matos and Ward 2012; Peteet 1991; Theidon 2003, 2013). The Kashmiri patriarchy has become the "subaltern" within the masculine Indian military apparatus. The dynamics between genders reveal the nonhegemonic hierarchy on which the Kashmiri patriarchy exists. In an "inversion of tradition" (Aretxaga 1997: 66), Kashmiri women have become chaperones of men to protect them from the wrath of the Indian forces. Yet this is not to say that patriarchal oppression of women has receded. What Sadaf represents as an activist is a triumph of subalterity within subalterity.

On the one hand, the micropolitics of Sadaf's activism manifests in how she inverts the stranglehold that the government and society have on her. On the other hand, she says of her life as a half-widow: "I listen to everyone now." Despite the unprecedented work that she does as an activist, Sadaf reminisces about how "modern" she was in her earlier life with Manzoor. For her, the notion of being modern is connected to her appearance—how she looked and how well she dressed in nontraditional garments and Western clothes. Sadaf summed up this option of choosing her appearance:

“I would do my own thing and listen to no one.” Nonetheless, as a married woman, her lifestyle was strongly influenced by Manzoor, who supported her love of non-Kashmiri attire. Sadaf feels that in her current state, as a half-widow activist, she is not free “to appear as she likes” and hence she is “listening” to everyone. But this is true only as far as her appearance goes, for in all other decisions—such as moving to the city, finding employment, and becoming an activist—she has forged ahead without entirely subjecting herself to the social mores.

While mourning the “disappearance” of her earlier modernly dressed self, Sadaf cannot be seen as entirely submitting to external social regulation. The onus on her for how she appears publicly—no doubt an important aspect of her agency—is evident in Sadaf’s own thinking. Like her social counterparts, she equates a “modern” appearance with “not listening to anyone” and therefore as “not good.” Thus, even for Sadaf, the ideal of the *asal zanan* is the one “who is not seen,” and she fine-tunes her look to “appear” as such when she is inside her home, like the “backstage” Erving Goffman (1959) proposes.¹⁵ For a brief moment, supposedly free from external surveillance, Sadaf dresses in colorful dresses that befit her age, but she is also always thinking about perfecting her appearance as an activist in the outside world. Over the years, whenever I wanted to give her a gift, she asked for a headscarf, which she would inspect carefully to see if the design and color were suitable for the “outside.” The surveillance in the creation of the good half-widow is panopticonic, where Sadaf herself is also a part of the social regulation.

Sadaf expressed how her friends and family acknowledge her ideal woman hood as a good half-widow. Her friends admitted that Sadaf’s metamorphosis from a colorfully dressed young woman, who resembled a popular Bollywood actress, to someone who looks “older than her years,” is a mark of piety and loyalty to Manzoor. Thus being an *asal zanan* remains primarily linked to appearance. The visibility that Sadaf gains as an activist remains beholden to the performance of being an *asal zanan*. Performing agency in this mode is harder, for it has to be guarded, almost undetected, and yet be generative of public activism. The agency that Sadaf performs

cannot be bound by one rigid definition concerned with being brazenly confrontational or upfront. She appears to conform to what the social mores demand of her as a woman, especially in appearance and behavior. She molds her face and body, bending like liquid metal running in the labyrinthine streams of sociality. Furthermore, she is agentive, strategic, always in action and in a constant performance.

Through this process Sadaf's body remains central to her activism. In contrast to a Bollywood starlet who takes items of clothing off one by one to attain visibility, Sadaf adds layers to attain a visibility necessitated by the disappearance of her husband and, at the same time, to invoke the social invisibility she needs to sustain her activism. This hidden visibility is a mark of Foucauldian biopolitics, where individuals attempt to break from the grip of disciplinary powers by reinventing their bodies to create a pathway of action for whatever the goal might be. The icon of a good half-widow is therefore a performance that accommodates both the power of social and political constraints as well as the capacity to act against them.

THE GAZE

I first saw Sadaf at a monthly protest. A voluminous scarf covered her hair, body, and face, revealing only her eyes. Her gaze was downcast and tearful. Around her neck she wore a photograph of Manzoor with his name and the date of his disappearance written across it. She held a placard stating, "Half-widow: return my disappeared husband." Tears streamed down her face as she wailed in a low pitch. Sadaf was not the only half-widow covering her face and looking down. Such images of the half-widow or lamenting mother have become iconic as well as generic representations of the devastation that the Indian military occupation has wreaked in Kashmir.

Media presence is pivotal to the APDP protests. Most of the activists know that media magnify their presence. In my discussions and observations, I noticed how much they value the power of media for disseminating their message. Most of them have become equally cognizant of the coverage they receive or how they are projected in reports. The

public gaze is focused on APDP activists, and they themselves establish the politics of mourning through imagery. I explore how the activists perceive and are perceived. Many images proliferate in the media, be it print or electronic. They can roughly be categorized as ambient and visage shots. The ambient shots include general vignettes from the protests, and the visage shots include close-ups and long shots of individual activists, where the focus often is the face. The mothers and the older half-widows most often look directly into the camera, while the younger women, especially the half-widows, appear with an averted gaze, downcast eyes, often with their faces hidden.¹⁶ During a protest, when mothers wail louder and are more vocal, the half-widows maintain a low profile and shed tears discreetly; most of the time, their faces are covered with a scarf, leaving only their eyes visible. It is also common for a half-widow to wear a burkha especially for the event.

Photographs of APDP activists gain amplified visibility and establish the activist in resistance, as a counterspectacle to the enforced disappearance effected by government forces. However, these photographs are not just images taken by professional photographers (photojournalists); they are careful artifacts testifying to the injury that disappearance causes and to the agency of the APDP activists. In controlling the image, the photographer temporarily has power over those in front of the lens, and the camera is often used to represent a “controlling gaze.” Here, however, I illustrate something more nuanced and subtle—that is, how the APDP activists *control* how they should be gazed upon.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger has observed that women appear (while men act). Women watch themselves being looked at, and mostly this awareness has to do with “being seen by a spectator” (Berger 1972), where the implied spectator is male. Similarly, the women of the APDP have an engagement with how they are seen and how they will be judged when they appear in the public sphere. The exemplars of images of Zooneh or Parveena, or most mother-activists, show how these women use a *direct address* that establishes a parasocial relationship with the viewer, buttressed by facial expression and actions.¹⁷ The mothers might at times be depicted

looking out of the frame, perhaps looking at someone or something, with associated gestures, postures, and copious tears.

At the same time, there are the young half-widows, who refrain, as Sadaf said, from having “their faces splashed on the front page of the newspapers, which is not what an *asal zanan* does.” In pictures I analyzed, half-widows and young women activists use an *averted gaze* (even if their face is covered), depicting a noticeable avoidance of the gaze of another or of the camera lens (and thus of the viewer). The end result may involve them looking up, looking down, or looking away.¹⁸ This *indirect address* represents an *offer* in which the viewer is an invisible onlooker and the depicted person is the *object* of the look (Dyer 1982). The young women direct their gaze outwardly at their surroundings, since they are aware of the social ramifications of a woman who is in public, sitting by the side of the road. They know the community—both men and women are looking at them. The averted gaze of a young Kashmiri woman anticipates an audience and a resistance; her conscious look directed outward is also a self-conscious one.

Here, two things are important to note. First, most of the older women (who tend to be mothers not half-widows) often employ a direct gaze, somewhat reminiscent of the analysis of the male models in pictures. They are open-faced, not shy about being photographed in public. This is telling of the elevated status of mothers, who are seen as devoid of sexual potential and even as surpassing the constraints of their gender—a characteristic that mother-activists especially acquire through their advanced age, bolstered by selfless activism. The reinforced role of a brave, vigilant mother makes APDP activists, like Parveena and others who have lost their sons, in some way equivalent to men, or more accurately, not-women. Second, the half-widows in photographs often avert their eyes or are looking away—they return the viewer’s gaze, engaging like the female models, but instead of alluring smiles, they depict tears, indignation, or stare into nothingness. The half-widows tend to be younger than the other activists; the average age of those with whom I talked was thirty to thirty-five; most are under forty-seven and still conscious of their youthfulness.¹⁹

The content of this type of gaze underlines the social expectations placed on the half-widows, whose primary turf of activism is not only being a mother to their children but a wife—the sexual partner of the disappeared. As my analysis of the photographs revealed, the activists of the APDP—be they mothers or half-widows—are not passive; rather, they engineer their gaze to control the message and the perceptions of them and their activism. They build carefully on the substrate of the women they are expected to be socially amid political violence.

PUSHING THE SOCIAL ENVELOPE

The ethnographic detailing of Parveena's and Sadaf's lives is illustrative of the discursive contentions around gendered agency, especially in a militarized zone. Kashmiri society has no precedent for dealing with the contingencies produced by militarization that has forced women into publicly contending with not only state terror but also the overall social distrust that it has instigated. In the lives of APDP activists, we see how the social fabric of Kashmir—already worn out from more than seventy years of strife and militarization and twenty-nine years of armed violence—is coming even further apart. Gender inequities already present in the society are exacerbated and biases are heightened. This works to the advantage of the government because it recedes as the *direct* aggressor as the social hierarchy intimately cracks down on women. Enforced disappearances as a punishment not only focus on the elimination of Kashmiri resistance to Indian rule but also unravel the Kashmiri culture in unique ways. They have created lacunae in the social order, even disappearing the community, as it once knew itself, giving way to anomie.

Yet the APDP activists, like Parveena and Sadaf, persist in their daily lives and activism. As Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) has asserted, the resistance that is shown by women in situations of violence does not only have to be a grand act or an awe-inspiring revolutionary act. Amid wars, where the dominant impetus is to kill or be killed, looking out for one's own survival and that of one's family must be considered as being tantamount to

subversion against the government, which is bent upon killing. Simultaneously, every act of survival should be seen as a version of resistance that is representative of agency in its basic, routine form. Agency can thus be understood as those small acts of daily personal resistance, which may or may not immediately challenge the prevailing social order, but in the long run has the potential for it. Thus such agency and resistance is often based on a complex religious and cultural ideology, which becomes visible to a deep ethnographic investigation.

More important, as illustrated by lives of activist women like Sadaf, agency can also appear as a potent amalgam of subversion and subjection, emerging as a highly nuanced and ultimately contextual form of resistance. The APDP activists do not take an outright aggressive and openly subversive stance against the government, but the politics of mourning they deploy is more than just a simple notion of an outright battle against oppression.²⁰ Within their communities the APDP women establish their activist identity in such a way that it reveals a fine-grained and nuanced agency, which may appear not only in stereotypical confrontational forms but as nuanced culturally. Their activism is often in danger of being overlooked as passive, such as the mentions of them as “poor women crying.” Yet the individual and collective struggle of the APDP has become a part of the bigger movement for justice, human rights, and freedom for Kashmir.



i know
women should not be seen—
should I hide?

i know
women should not be heard—
should I be quiet?

i know
if all i do—
is listen
listen
who will find you?

CHAPTER 4

GENDERED RESISTANCE IN KASHMIR

In 2016, when the summer uprising was in full swing, women were becoming increasingly visible in the streets as part of the civilian resistance. It was not only the older, stay-at-home women but young female students who came out to participate in demonstrations. They were protesting human rights abuses and demanding self-determination. Their attitude was combative, and they showed no fear of persecution. Some even expressed their opinions explicitly on Kashmir's political future and the demand for self-determination in the media. While Kashmiri women have always participated in resistance, the scale of the demonstrations by female students launched from schools and colleges was on the increase. This expression was not sudden, but it must be seen as the epitome of the gendered resistance that has always been part of the political culture of Kashmir, which has only increased post-1989.¹

Kashmiri women indeed participate in the civilian resistance, but their mode of expression is gendered and woven into the fabric of their everyday lives. Focusing on Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) activists illustrates how women perceive and “do” politics. In the long run, whether the politics of protest and subsequent activism will pave the way for greater political participation, not just in the streets but also in having the proverbial “seat at the table,” remains to be seen. This analysis illuminates the travails of nonhegemonic Kashmiri masculinity vis-à-vis the powerful military apparatus and how it affects the gender dynamics in Kashmir as women are pushed to the forefront.

WOMEN AS PROTECTORS AND PROTESTORS

After 1989, as militancy heightened, the counterinsurgency policies against combatants and civilians, more likely to be men, reached an all-time high (Choudhury and Moser-Puangsuwan 2007). Many mass protests against human rights violations turned into massacres. Such has been the disproportionate and fatal force used by the government troops that a calendar commemorating these incidents spans from January through December and more often marks several incidents per month. The names of some towns, hamlets, and bridges have become synonymous with assassinations, fake encounters, custodial killings, massacres, and rapes. Kashmiri men face increasing violence at the hands of the troops, and women are not spared either.

Social science scholarship shows that as a category, masculinity hinges on the role of providing sustenance and protection (Gutmann 1997). In studies on different cultural and political contexts, scholars illustrate how the validity of the assumption of men as protectors comes into question and how this role evolves in zones of violence (Aretxaga 1997; De Matos and Ward 2012; Peteet 1991; Theidon 2003, 2013). Kashmiri men represent a progression into a nonhegemonic masculinity under the military apparatus, which has constrained and curbed their psychological and physical autonomy. Thus the Kashmiri patriarchy functions under extreme coercion and threat from the militarized government. I use the word “patriarchy” as bell hooks (2004: 18) has defined it, as “a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance.”

In her ethnography on “the troubles” in Northern Ireland, Begona Aretxaga (1997: 66) has identified a phenomenon she terms an “inversion of tradition.” Fearing the British soldiers would attack the Irish Republican men, Irish women, in order to protect them, would chaperone them everywhere. In Kashmir too, since 1989, women (as mothers, sisters, and wives) increasingly have offered their physical presence. They accompany

men in emergencies or routine errands, or when they are summoned by the police, military, or paramilitary, in hopes that they might somehow help diffuse the impending wrath of the forces. The gender dynamic has become telling of the subject position of Kashmiri men relative to the government troops. Rehat, a mother whose son was disappeared, said of her husband: “Just because he is a man, he will be killed without a word if he tries to go out and confront the soldiers.”

Rehat’s apprehensions are not unfounded. Without fail, men by default are the recipients of direct violence, but it is not as if women are not targets as well. It seems that a woman accompanying a man somehow transforms him into a low-risk adversary; of course, this is not always a guarantee of safety. Rehat added: “Being a man, he [her husband] might get as enraged as the soldier and worsen his chances of getting out alive safely.” Rehat’s account suggests that one of the reasons she had chaperoned her husband was to ensure that he would not give in to anger. “I left everything to God,” she said, “but if they [soldiers] killed my husband, my life was over anyway.”² Her statement indicates the traditional intertwining of a woman’s life with her husband’s; his death would result in diminishing her life in any case.

Over the years, in the increasingly trying circumstances, Kashmiri women have often been required to come to the forefront outside the home. The neighborhood men will often make announcements from the masjid loudspeaker, calling women out into the streets to protest against an atrocity perpetrated by government troops.³ Every locality recognizes that hurried crackle of the masjid loudspeakers when a local man or boy in utter panic, sometimes no less than the imam (leader of the congregation) himself, requests all women of the neighborhood to come out in the streets. Usually the call is worded as such: “Tamaam Majjin Benin che appeal yewan karneh ki tem nyeran sadki peth dharna dineh [We appeal to all mothers and sisters to come into the street and stage a *dharna*].” Upon hearing this, women come out to demonstrate.

Since 1989, the precedent has been for women to flock outside to stage demonstrations and sit-ins (*dharnas*) in the public square or in front of an

army bunker or camp. Paradoxically, women (who are supposed to “not be seen” in a conservative society) are exhorted to come out in the streets, and that too from the masjid pulpit, stereotypically seen as a mantle that proscribes women’s public role. It is through this recurrent phenomenon that in contemporary times women came to the forefront of protest politics, staging *dharnas* for long hours outside military installations or government buildings in the hopes that the arrestees would be freed or that the women would learn of the men’s whereabouts. At the same time, men are discreetly behind the scenes trying to find help from higher-ups in the administration. This analysis provides a general overview. By no means do I mean to say that this strategy for addressing human rights abuses is strictly gendered. In the initial stages of a search for a disappeared or arrested person, it is routine for Kashmiri men to band together as neighbors or family to appeal to the authorities. Usually it is a well-respected neighborhood elder, such as an imam, who will spearhead an informal neighborhood group to meet the local politician, police, or army.

Alternatively, contact will be initiated with informal brokers, people who mediate matters of arrests, abuse, or other violations with the government forces, mostly by use of bribes. To reinforce that the missing person or person in custody has dependents who are suffering, a female figure (like a mother or a wife) or an ailing father or children will be taken along. Parveena Ahangar, as well as other APDP activists, initially took part in such expeditions. As their search protracted, people dropped out. Most fathers, who are the primary breadwinners, had to return to day jobs; thus the burden of activism falls doubly upon the women. The men, however, as I have observed in case of the APDP, often work in the background helping to gather the paperwork and engage in behind-the-scenes negotiations pertaining to the case in the courts or the army.

In the case of Syed Ahmed’s disappearance, in the initial years Zooneh’s husband would secure an audience with politicians, army, and police while Zooneh went out to participate in public protests. At first, the roles that each one took on in the struggle of the disappeared son were complementary. Eventually, as the search stretched on, Zooneh took over

the legal and official procedures as well. “My husband was working full-time; he had to earn, and importantly, not get killed,” she explained of the protest politics. “If men would demonstrate, the soldiers would just shoot at them, whereas when women go, they think of us as weak; they might not shoot instantly but will go berserk and harass us.”⁴ In the case of public movements like the APDP or the general politics of protest, women’s participation underlines the gender equation that has evolved in Kashmir since the militarization began intensifying. Women had to become visible partners to find redress.

I asked Parveena if her husband has ever stopped her from taking part in protests or objected or offered to take her place. She said that he tried all three options with her, which she rejected because she did not want her husband to take part in the demonstrations. “I would not allow him; as a man, the first thing they [troops] give is a bullet.” Even though her husband had entreated her to, Parveena refused to stay home, and she encouraged him to return to work. “We had three more mouths to feed, so he had to work.” She expressed appreciation that her husband allowed her to continue activism, which she felt was generous of him as a husband. “As a man, a husband is *majaz* [lawful/competent] and can command me to stay home,” she said, “but he finally agreed. Also, we had no other option. He is a man—that too, a Kashmiri man. He felt more helpless; who would help him or us?” Overall, in the APDP, men (like Parveena’s husband) have supported the struggle through behind-the-scenes labor, especially collecting paperwork and initiating legal cases. Because most APDP activists, especially the mothers, are not formally educated, they have had to depend on family—mostly men—to get the basic official procedures started. Today, after their long involvement, most of them have become adept at carrying out official procedures.

Invoking government forces’ discrimination against men, Sadaf explained: “When we returned from Delhi, I would not let my husband out of my sight. If he went out, I went with him. It was also my worry to have given birth to boys; they [government troops] kill men at first sight.” Zooneh said that men would initially feel offended or refuse to take a

woman as protection. She attributed this behavior to *mardeh mizaaj* (male temperament). But increasingly women who were mothers, wives, and sisters would accompany men when they ventured out during risky hours. Likely, the sight of a woman accompanying a man was stereotypical shorthand for a family on the move, rather than combatants. The presence of women was possibly seen as making men less adversarial. However, it is not that Kashmiri women have been safer than men; to the contrary, they have often been victims of sexual violence as well as routine physical violence, just like their men (Human Rights Watch 2006; OHCHR 2018).

Regarding women participating fearlessly in public protests, not in the APDP's monthly sit-ins but the impromptu ones that follow atrocities committed by government forces, Zooneh said: "Who knows, a bullet may hit me inside my home. It is risky everywhere. We have seen so many Kashmiris die inside and outside that what is one more life anyway?" According to Zooneh, women hope that coming out in droves might decrease the chances of being shot at, but this assumption often proves incorrect, since the government troops are known to use disproportionate force indiscriminately. As far as physical harassment is concerned, Zooneh said: "In a group, chances of *badtameezei* [rudeness/uncouthness] are always there. They [police/soldiers] will push or pull at scarves, shove us, or even drag us, or say vile things; women face different risks, but we hope, since we are demonstrating as a group, the chances of doing anything else are lesser."⁵ By "anything else," Zooneh meant that the chances of overt sexual assault might be avoided when a huge group of women is demonstrating. Physical and sexual assault are pervasive, however, and do occur (Batoool et al. 2016; Manecksha 2016).

The steady increase of women's participation in the civilian demonstrations is telling of the changes in gender dynamics and highlights the increasingly subordinate nature of Kashmiri masculinity in relation to the military occupation. Perhaps the military does not see the women as equal adversaries as they view the men. As lesser adversaries, their treatment of the women is arbitrary at best; that is, they might not be killed or arrested as readily as the men. The primary dangers to them are

molestation or rape, and sometimes women will be killed anyway or let off with considerable humiliation and harassment. The main worry for all Kashmiri women who take part in demonstrations is not being killed but suffering any form of physical assault—worse than being killed because it spells social death. Scholars have illustrated that physical assault or rape during war and conflict, while making women the direct victims, is a proven tactic aimed at humiliating men and the community at large, who attach their honor to their women (Brownmiller 1975; Millilo 2009). While rape or sexual assault might be meted out on a woman's body, its purpose is often to punish the men to whom the woman is perceived to belong and to break the community as a whole.

ANATOMY OF A DHARNA

One afternoon in the summer of 2010, I sat inside Zooneh's kitchen while outside the city was aflame with mass protests and stone-pelting incidents against government forces. The whole swathe of the historic downtown and some of the suburbs—which come under the charge of “six police stations,” a term that had become notorious with the imposition of frequent curfews—were aflame with mass demonstrations. As Zooneh and I waited for the tea that her daughter-in-law Babli was making, we heard a commotion in the street. The police had arrested three boys who had been part of a demonstration and were accused of stone pelting. The public address system in the local mosque crackled, but instead of the *azaan* (call to prayer), a male voice asked all the neighborhood women to hurry out. Zooneh instructed Babli and Lali to stay inside the house while the two of us rushed out with other neighborhood women. Even though they were instructed otherwise, Babli and Lali joined us. We all walked out in a demonstration before squatting in front of the bunker for a *dharna*.

A *dharna* usually entails protestors sitting en masse near a police station or an army camp, where an apprehended person might be detained. It is a sitting-down version of picketing. The *dharna* can also morph into a mobile protest if the arrestee is being held somewhere else. Older women will often

lead the *dharna* , but if not available, a younger woman, preferably one who is married, might take charge. Younger women are usually in the back, and little girls and boys may also be there with the adults. This is not a strict hierarchy but is typically followed by a group to protect the most vulnerable among them. In the case of a demonstration for a person (arrestee or killed) who is well known, women from different localities will also join. Otherwise, if it is a local boy, the protest may remain confined to the immediate neighborhood.

There are roughly two kinds of mass demonstrations that occur in Kashmir. One is a spontaneous protest march, known as *jaloos* (procession), that erupts after the killing of a well-known militant or if the atrocity committed was massive. In the case of a killing, it is often a hybrid of a funeral and demonstration: a funeral-protest that includes young and old men, women, and children. With emotions running high, gendered etiquette appears to collapse under the weight of the atrocity. Women do not care about social propriety; mothers, daughters, and other women close to the victim often lead the processions and lament, regardless of whether their hair or face is covered or not. In 2018 the breakdown in social decorum during such events was manifest in a photograph where women stood shoulder to shoulder with men offering funeral prayers for those killed by government troops. A desegregated prayer is hotly contested, a taboo practice in most Muslim societies. The other type of protest is one like the APDP conducts, which has been formalized over the years and is pre-planned, also called a *muzahira* (demonstration). Given their implications, the terms *jaloos* or *muzahira* are used interchangeably, but I deploy them separately to indicate the difference in types of civilian protests.

Zooneh took the lead in the *dharna* , and we congregated near the local bunker. The women chanted slogans in both Kashmiri and Urdu. The first shouted, “Begunahoon ko chod do [Release the innocents],” followed by “Ai zalimo ai jabi-ro Kashmir hamara chod do [O tyrants and oppressors, leave our Kashmir].” Even though the women were using Kashmiri and Urdu slogans, these two stood out and were relayed only in Urdu, probably to make sure that the soldiers got the message. In many *dharnas* , as

happened in this one, a verbal altercation also ensues between the women and the soldiers and police. The soldiers feigned ignorance about the arrest and told the women they were seeking help in the wrong place, since the soldiers had detained no one. The eyewitnesses knew the soldiers were lying, which infuriated the women, and they stayed put at the site.

It is well known that during confrontations the Kashmiri protestors increasingly engage in a war of words with the government troops. This exchange is replete with swearing, creative insults, and lyrical invectives on the side of the demonstrators, to which the soldiers have been known to respond. These instances of public bravado have become part of the resistance lore. The women in the *dharna* daringly confronted the soldiers and did not hold their tongues either. About this verbal sparring, Zooneh said: “What will they do, kill? Haven’t they killed before? Why should we fear?”

In a matter of minutes a few police jeeps and an army truck encircled the area. A smattering of men joined the women, and the slogans became louder. We were told to wait for the Station House Officer (SHO) in charge of the local police station, who was expected to intervene. He did not arrive, and the women pelted stones at the bunker. A soldier fired a warning shot and everyone ran. We hobbled into a nearby alley. The women hurrying after us were heaping the choicest invectives on the forces. Everyone dispersed into spaces they could find away from the charging forces. We ended up in a tiny courtyard. The women of the adjoining house came out. They took us in and bolted the door behind us. Outside, the paramilitary patrolled the area. They had begun shouting threats and invectives, breaking windowpanes, and hitting doors. We heard a cry—maybe they had caught someone—but we did not dare look outside. The end of the protest left us fearing for our lives, with no clues about the arrestees. This aftermath was no different than what happens with most demonstrations: in the following days, the dead body of one of the boys was found on the banks of a nearby river.

MATERNAL SURVEILLANCE AND THE POLITICS OF THE “APOLITICAL”

Sally Webb Thornton (2000) has reminded us that many movements across the world started by women become active outside of formal organizations and often lack connections to official power structures. Such groups often define themselves primarily via their social roles that give them some form of power to build a movement, like motherhood, which in most cultures is a prime site of ethical and moral credibility. A few prominent examples of such movements that draw credibility and are founded upon maternal politics are the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (“the Madres,” Argentina), the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers (Russia), the Tiananmen Mothers (China), Mothers of the Disappeared (CO-MADRES, El Salvador), and the Hibakusha women (Japan). Scholarship on gendered social movements has reiterated that motherhood is “a major site of ethics” (Aretxaga 1997: 59).

The exemplars of Zooneh, Mogal Maas, and Parveena Ahangar have become icons of maternal morality and agency, eulogized as the epitome of *asal zanan*. Not just the women who are mothers to the disappeared men, but the wives, the half-widows, also foreground their role as mothers, foremost to the children (or half-orphans as they are sometimes called) that they share with their disappeared husbands. When the half-widows in the APDP make motherhood central to their activism, it becomes telling of what part of womanhood they lay claim to—the one that is seen beyond gender, the mother, and not the “sexual” female, which a wife symbolizes. Hence motherhood is also claimed as a turf for activism by the half-widows. Ironically, motherhood should have been more of a reminder of female sexuality, since the very attainment of the mother status denotes a sexual life.

However, the social sentiment around motherhood is anything but sexual. The category of the mother—stereotypically seen as an asexual, non-threatening entity—is allowed “lawful digressions” and what Judith Butler (2004c) has called “virtuous disobedience” within patriarchal norms. Sadaf, my key research partner, expressed this sentiment repeatedly by

saying, “I am a mother; how can I stop searching for my children’s father?” In this way she was projecting herself primarily as the protagonist for her children, for whom the return of their father is important. The law of moral obligation to family through being a mother is seen as superior to a political law and social decorum tied to femininity. This maternal instigation to activism enables bypassing social restrictions on women, especially those who do not have a husband. Thus motherhood frames and legitimizes women’s political activity and gives them the power to act in public (Warren 2007).

Just as motherhood fuels the activism, however, there is an inherent danger of the APDP’s concerted struggle being reduced to the activists being just poor mothers, or not adequately professional as human rights activists or not political enough. Thus there is a danger that motherhood as a turf of moral agency might subsume the political nature of the movement.

Although the APDP members are mostly “accidental activists” (McWilliams 1995), Temma Kaplan (1982) has argued that public mobilization becomes an entryway into political consciousness and ultimately feminist consciousness. In my conversations Parveena Ahangar and the senior APDP activists, most of whom themselves are not formally educated or in professional jobs, would often say, “Wan rood ne su zamana [Times have changed].” They are clearly rooting for better education opportunities for the women in their family. They envisaged a more egalitarian gender dynamics within their homes and community.

Notably, without making pompous political claims, they also contextualized their struggle within the Kashmiri Tehreek (resistance movement against Indian rule). The maternal “virtuous disobedience” on their part appeared as a tool to overcome social and political constraints. But the danger of adherence to moral law rather than political law also contributes to the perception of women as largely nonpolitical (Aretxaga 1997). This became evident when the Indian media house CNN-IBN nominated Parveena Ahangar as Indian of the Year. Purportedly, the award nomination recognizes an Indian citizen who has “strengthened the foundation of our [India] society and has helped build Brand India in the

process.” The APDP as an organization was nominated for “relentlessly highlighting the issue of missing persons in Kashmir, and forcing the government and rights groups to acknowledge and act” (Vij 2011a).

Parveena Ahangar was outraged by the nomination. The APDP issued a press release calling the move by CNN-IBN “patently absurd” and reiterating that their “struggle for justice and accountability has never been about ‘building Brand India’ but about questioning and challenging Brand India and it’s trampling over the rights and lives of the people of Kashmir” (Ahangar 2011). The CNN-IBN nomination described the cases of enforced disappearances in Kashmir as those of “missing persons,” consistent with the governments’ use of nomenclature that obfuscates Kashmiri political history and the role of military occupation in affecting the disappearances. The nomination was utterly misleading in claiming that due to the efforts of the APDP, the government and its agencies had acted and acknowledged the issue of enforced disappearances in Kashmir. It has been proven that no case of enforced disappearance has been solved thus far; in fact, even Parveena’s own case remains languishing in the courts.

The APDP stated the following about the nomination: “[A] gratuitous nomination of our organization for this award which smacks of being yet another attempt by corporate Indian media to cover up and neutralize the crimes of the Indian state in Kashmir . . . the only real ‘award’ the news channel can bestow upon us is consistent and honest reportage of the heinous crimes committed by the armed forces in Kashmir and highlight the struggles and sacrifices of the people of Kashmir for justice and freedom” (ibid.). The APDP’s strong political statement expresses a clear stand for justice as well as Kashmir’s freedom. In the backdrop the APDP has always claimed that it is an “apolitical” organization. To reiterate its degree of “apolitical-ness,” in an interview, Parveena Ahangar went on record to say that the APDP is not even a human rights organization but a persistent search for missing kin (Rashid 2009; Zahoor 2011). An early version of the APDP mission statement explained the group: “The APDP technically is not a human rights group but the association of the sufferers wronged by the functioning of the state, who are campaigning for knowing the whereabouts

of their missing relatives. Any person who is a victim of the disappearances could be a member of the association. The association has no political affiliations or political positions. It is an independent group seeking justice from the state.”⁶

The negation of not being a human rights group in its first mission statement and instead being an “association of sufferers” is important to understanding how a rights group creates space and operates under a repressive government apparatus. The focus is to appear knowingly apolitical, which is the most political of stances. The APDP’s current updated mission statement is detailed in explaining the group’s mandate and does not include the clause about political position. Notably, while rejecting the award, the APDP statement endorses the “struggles and sacrifices of the people of Kashmir for justice and freedom,” which again is not an apolitical stance. It is in these overlapping zones of political and apolitical framings around its working, I surmise, that being apolitical becomes a creative mode of politics that allows the APDP to even exist under a government bent on suppressing Kashmiri voices.

In Kashmir, “politics” as a term and a process has become a fraught and complicated terrain under Indian rule. To illustrate this, I explore the word “politics” in the context of how it is spoken of in Kashmir. The English word “politics” is connected to “doing politics” with political parties, which are specifically pro-India, taking part in elections, and are the only ones that openly flourish under government patronage. The Urdu-Kashmiri word *siyasat* is also used for “politics,” which, akin to its English counterpart, is seen as the dubious forte of pro-India politicians. When the APDP activists are asked about their politics, they steer clear of having any *siyasat* (or politics) that might even remotely indicate any “pro-Indian-partytiness.” Parveena said their group had nothing to do with *siyasat* and they “did not need a *kursi* [chair],” forcefully clarifying that they had nothing to do with pro-India electoral politics. Being part of *siyasat* (politics) or being a *siyasatdaan* (politician) is connected with India. Over the years these words have attained the status of being slurs, worse than being a “murderer or adulterer,” as one Kashmiri put it. Some turn *siyasat daan* into *siyasat*

daand — the suffix means “ox,” which conveys the negative sentiments connected to this section of Kashmiris. The word “politics” is used as much as, if not less than, the Kashmiri word *siyasat*, which is equally notorious. “Politics” (pronounced “PAAL-itiks” colloquially)—as connected to Indian politics—is seen as demeaning and thus, in the context of the APDP, not fitting or fair to its mission.

The Kashmiris who align with Tehreek politics are not termed as *siyasatdaan* or politicians; they are referred to as anything but. Most are known as Hurriyet-wael (those who are with Hurriyet), after the conglomerate of resistance outfits. The Kashmiri masses do not see Hurriyet as entirely representative and do not unquestioningly follow the conglomerate. But there is an overarching agreement based on the group’s collective stance against Indian rule and support for the UN resolutions that supersedes the differences in aspirations that range from demands of independence to a merger with Pakistan. The Hurriyet members or other resistance activists not associated with it are also called Tehreeki (loyalist of the resistance, armed or civilian). Some people used to call them *Ahlaidgi-pasand* (separatist), which currently many Kashmiris are discarding as a term. Nayeem, one of my research partners, explains: “We never legally agreed to the accession treaty with India, so there is no question of separation. We are all only Tehreeki.” The terrain of nomenclature is a minefield in Kashmir; where relations can be broken or made through the use or misuse of terms representing certain politics. Living in a chronic political conflict that has politicized their everyday lives, Kashmiris are a culture that is steeped in politics and political discourse. Yet for most people there is wariness in expressing one’s viewpoint for fear of persecution. Thus anyone—be it an organization or an individual—claiming to be apolitical becomes an implicit political category.

Even without overtly labeling their politics, the APDP activists have become agents of political and social change. As a symbol of this, Parveena Ahangar is known for her resistance in and outside of Kashmir. In her acceptance speech for the Rafto Human Rights Defender Prize in 2017, she powerfully traced her journey as an accidental activist who is searching for

justice and supports Kashmir's struggle for freedom. She reminded the world of the UN's promise of a referendum and expressed her disappointment in the Indian state. In saying, "In Kashmir, we are living in a daily war," her politics were more than palpable (Ahangar 2017).

BEING A WOMAN ACTIVIST

Sadaf deftly deploys her activist identity (or rather, she does *not* deploy it). The ways in which she chooses to make herself visible or present under extreme surveillance is illustrative. The Indian military apparatus does not consider the Kashmiri women as equal adversaries as the Kashmiri men, but at the same time the women are able to use the forced category to their advantage as a discreet mode of operation to pursue human rights activism. One morning in 2011, Sadaf, her youngest son, Sajju, and I, along with our driver, Altaf, were on our way to the Varmul district in North Kashmir to visit a few families of disappeared persons.⁷ The main part of Varmul is an undeclared garrison town. At the town's entrance, contiguous to the army camps, is the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). It is distinctive because its sky-blue walls are emblazoned with its title. The UNMOGIP has forty-four installations in various parts of Kashmir and yet remains the most invisible presence, except for its headquarters in Srinagar, which has become an iconic site for demonstrations seeking the UN-mandated plebiscite.

The entrance to Varmul appears lush, with its famed colonnade of poplars that has been used as a backdrop for many cavorting lovers in Bollywood films. As this famed highway ebbs, we come to a road that opens up like two calloused hands that have been stuck together in an unanswered prayer. The streets are dirty, assortments of military bunkers weave in and out of the alleys, and horse-drawn carts ply side by side with cars and mini-buses. There are soldiers everywhere. The local populace and businesses seem huddled in the center, dirty and dilapidated. Some new buildings are being built in the dusty maze. There are army camps on both sides of the roads. The walls and entrances to the camps are pockmarked,

probably after stone pelting by Kashmiri youth. The walls are high, fortified with angled iron rods covered with electric fencing, and there are masses of barbed wire upon which empty liquor bottles hang like limp glass notes.

Interestingly, the electrically rigged walls display huge framed pictures of flowers in the backdrop of the famed Mughal Gardens and idyllic *shikaras* (wooden boats) on the famed Dal Lake. These frames depicting peaceful Kashmiri scenery are in sharp contrast to the military encampment. This exhibition of Kashmir's natural glory on the camp walls appears oxymoronic—a digressive act that appears to be an “inverse camouflage” to make the military installation *visible* as less hostile-looking to the public. I asked Sadaf what she thought of this innovation by the army. Shrugging, she said, “Karaan [they do],” followed by, “Karin [let them do].” These Kashmiri phrases are often used to convey the futility of something that will be done. Sadaf added: “Phand karaan yuth khuneh athe bozne yenakh ne [They use trickery to hide the blood on their hands].”

The soldiers, bunkers, and armored vehicles seemed interwoven into the civilian life. The army appeared “just there.” As our car inched forward, we saw a soldier sitting on a tree stump, gesturing to the nearby butcher, who seemed agitated. Two soldiers on the other side of the street held an auto driver by the scruff of his neck and beat him. The auto is a noisy three-wheeled vehicle; designed to transport one or two passengers. Though it is more expensive than public buses, people often use it as the quickest way to travel between destinations. The auto stand where the drivers congregate is also known to be a popular neighborhood hub. Interestingly, in many localities the military bunkers and the auto stands are often in close proximity. In the early 1990s the auto drivers were the most persecuted demographic in Kashmir. Probably due to the mobile nature of their jobs, they were often suspected of being conduits for militants. Even today, many drivers remain easy suspects for the army. Coincidentally, here too the soldiers had caught a driver and a few people were braving to help the man.

The butcher jumped from his shop and rushed to the scene. Most people continued walking hurriedly without stopping. A safe distance from the scene, our car stopped in front of a bunker, which oozed like drab-colored

sludge onto the road, creating a bottleneck. The bunker was built with sandbags and was wrapped with concertina wires speckled with windswept rags. Next to this makeshift structure rose a brick-and-mortar checkpoint. Soldiers stood alert; one peered out of the small hole of a window, the muzzle of his gun pointed toward the passersby. In the 1990s most bunkers were made of sandbags, but today many have been replaced by permanent structures. Some are even accompanied by double-storied lookouts, complete with little temples and shrines depicting Hindu gods and goddesses, manifesting the dominant Hindu-ness of the Indian military. Their rituals are markedly different in language, form, and color and not too reminiscent of the practices of the Kashmiri Pandit Hindus that share many similarities with Muslim shrine practices.

The soldiers ordered us to disembark from the vehicle. Sadaf had already readied her son to take out his identity card. Sajju was only fourteen but above-average height for his age. He carried his school identity card. An identity card in Kashmir must be carried at all times, like a rescue inhaler for the asthmatic minus the guarantee of safety. A document that soldiers demand to see at will, the absence of an ID card can prove fatal. People refer to it as *identi carddh*, a pidgin form of the English term now naturalized into Kashmiri. People in government and private institutions have cards issued by their employers, while others might use generic versions, which are notarized by a government official. Many times, the identity cards carried by artisans and nonskilled workers might not even have any government official vetting. Under the intense surveillance of both public and private life, the showing of the ID card has become a type of ritual between the Indian soldiers and the Kashmiris. Failing to produce an ID card can result in beating, imprisonment, and even death. Although the card states factual information, it tells almost nothing about a person. Yet within the militarized governance, there is a tacit policy that people have to carry identification at all times. In my observation the *identi carddh* has become a government strategy to reinforce the subservient and suspect status of Kashmiri men within the militarized regime.

At the checkpoint Sajju was ready to show his ID card, followed by Altaf, our driver. Sadaf sighed and placed her hand on Sajju's shoulder as we inched forward toward the soldier. Sajju extended the card, and the soldier gave a quick, customary glance and went straight to patting him down. It took a long time—all the while the soldier was looking at Sadaf. Once he was done, the soldier ordered Sajju to get back into the car and Sadaf heaved a sigh of relief. Sadaf and I were not asked for cards, but our bags were thoroughly searched. All the while, the soldiers ogled Sadaf, but none of them looked toward me. Talking later, Sadaf said it was because I looked like I was from “outside” (i.e., not Kashmiri).

“I always get nervous around the soldiers,” Sadaf said. “ID card or no ID card, they can get away with anything. Now that Sajju is getting older, I get more and more anxious.” She worried that the adolescent fuzz made Sajju look older, which would increase the danger of him becoming a primary target of the soldiers' wrath and more likely to be stopped, questioned, harassed, or detained. Trying to calm her, our driver Altaf, a smug twenty-seven-year-old who looked much younger than his years, said, “Don't you worry, *Didi* [elder sister], he will be fine. Look at me; I have stayed safe so far.” The word “safe” in Altaf's lexicon meant he was still alive, having survived many beatings, detainments, and humiliations at the hand of government forces.

Altaf told us his daredevil strategy for staying safe in his confrontations with the soldiers. While his story seemed outlandish, it was telling of the pain that proving one's identity has become in Kashmir. He showed us a set of seven different ID cards that he carries on his person, all from different institutions. It is quite uncommon for people to carry so many cards, but in a place where proving one's identity is a matter of life and death, for Altaf these are ways of proving his bona fide alliances. To me, it appeared that he was playing an ID card game of sorts, which becomes telling of how futile and arbitrary this background check is. Altaf said that his use of a specific card depends on where the soldiers stop him. If it is a government office or a police station, he is likely to use one of the two cards he got from a pro-India political party designating him as a member. I asked him how he

managed to acquire these cards, since he is not a member of any pro-India political party. “No big deal,” he said, beaming at his cleverness. “The Indian parties happily give them. They like to make it look as if they have members in Kashmir. I am just a fake member, and I did not even get this myself—a friend got it for me.”

One of the cards was from a little known Indian political outfit named Bahujan Samaj Party, which has a minute presence in Kashmir. When I asked Altaf if he knew anything about this party, he said, with a chuckle, “May they burn in hell. Who cares? It helps me pass the checkpoints; that is all they are good for, tricking the soldiers.” Two other cards in Altaf’s possession were from the schools he had attended many years earlier. I asked him if it was dangerous to carry old cards. “I keep them to show I went to school,” he replied. “Besides, the soldiers don’t pay too much attention. I wonder if they know how to read Hindi, let alone English or Urdu.” Even though the soldiers need to have passed high school to get the job, Altaf’s dismissive attitude represents the general attitude that most Kashmiris have in deriding the Indian troops for their lack of basic intelligence, education, and civility.

The three other cards that Altaf had were from the various stores where he had worked as a salesman. He told us about a game he had once played with his friend, trying to prove that the soldiers did not pay any genuine attention to these documents. Judging by Altaf’s outlandish nature, I was not fully convinced of his story, but it is worth mentioning. If anything, it underlines the futility of the ID card as a process. Altaf said that once his friend, on a dare, printed a card that said “Government of Independent Kashmir” and even used it without getting caught. “They [soldiers] are blind,” scoffed Altaf. On another occasion Altaf was spurred by his friend to paste a picture of Rajiv Gandhi, the long dead ex-prime minister of India, on his card instead of his own. Since Altaf looked a little like a young, full-faced Rajiv Gandhi, it was not surprising that he got away with it. In Altaf’s narrative the ID card becomes a caricature of hypersurveillance. It appears as a device to enforce submission to the government’s authority, rather than being a serious investigative tool for the

soldiers. Altaf put it aptly: “They just ask for the card to create hurdles in our movement and instill fear; otherwise, what does a card prove? It never saved anyone from getting killed, nor will a Mujahid or *fidayeen* [suicide bomber] carry one.”

As a man, the ID card is pivotal in Altaf’s life, but for women it is not as mandatory, given that many women are not employed and thus might not possess one. When we passed through the checkpoint, neither Sadaf nor I were ever asked to show an ID card. We stood on the sidelines quietly seething at the soldiers ogling Sadaf, despite her being heavily clad in layers, and rummaging through our bags. For women it is not who they are as people but what they can carry in their bags for others, maybe as decoys or weapon carriers, and the burden of their female bodies that comes into question in these instances with government forces. I asked Sadaf what she thought about not being asked for ID, and she said simply, “Why? What is the need? I am woman—just a woman—a mother. They see men as dangerous; what can a woman do to them?”

After a pause, she added while arching her brows: “Even then, what will they see if they chose to see my ID card?” The way Sadaf said that she is a “woman/mother” suggested a certain assumed harmlessness, bordering on powerlessness, as if, unlike men, she is incapable of any subversion. In this mode she conveniently undermined and even overlooked her status as a highly “subversive” human rights activist. She obviously cannot carry an ID card that declares her status as a human rights activist because it can be a security risk. In any case most human rights activists hide the nature of their job, especially during fieldwork, to escape persecution. To escape detection, some activists use general ID cards designating them as “social welfare workers,” “contractors,” or “self-employed.”

Sadaf’s statement—“What will they see?”—is telling. She does carry a card from her beauty business, but it is very rare that she is asked for ID. The issue here is not only to understand how a gendered invisibility cloaks Sadaf when the soldiers ask a mere fourteen-year-old boy for a card and not a full-grown woman, but more important, how she herself chooses to become visible in the eyes of the soldiers. She does not want to be detected

as an activist. Her nonchalant comment hints at the complex visibility that she has achieved, which is nuanced, layered, and hard to readily comprehend. There is also a sense of resignation, in that the soldiers, as men, can only see her as the weaker sex, a woman. While passing through checkpoints, Sadaf said: “I always struggle to cover my bosom well. They stare at you and make you feel uncomfortable; did you not see how they were looking? I wish to be invisible at these moments; you never know.”⁸

On one level, “what will they see?” has to do with Sadaf’s *visible invisibility*. She is just a woman who does not need to prove her identity, because she is not an adversary equal to a male or a threat to the soldiers. On another level, she is hypervisible when she struggles to cover her bosom, her face, and steer clear of the “eyes” of soldiers as fast as she can, and not dwell on any importance that checking an ID card can assign to her as a person. At the same time, she hides herself and the *visibility* she has achieved for herself as a human rights defender behind her feminine, maternal identity to escape detection, so as not to jeopardize her activist status. At the checkpoint, which we passed together, I witnessed yet one more deeply affective aspect: that of a worried mother who is apprehensive about her son’s safety. “I always forget my own self when my sons are being frisked by the soldiers,” she said. “I don’t even pay attention to my safety till I know my children have moved away from the guns. Even after passing through, one has to be careful and discreet.”⁹



the partition
has become a stone in hand
answering bullets
that kill and blind
every day—

in Kashmir
mothers live to wait
for the disappeared
fathers survive
only to bury the killed
all epitaphs read
Azadi Azadi Azadi

CHAPTER 5

MILITARIZING HUMANITARIANISM AND LIFE IN THE GRAY ZONE

“There is terror in the beautiful faces of women and children, who run for cover when they see a soldier. Children are petrified and hide behind their mothers on seeing a passing soldier, policeman or camouflaged vehicle,” writes General Arjun Ray (2012: 4) about how Kashmiris perceive the Indian military. In 1997 he set out to change it through founding Operation Sadhbhava (“goodwill” in Hindi), a military humanitarian project that aimed to win the hearts and minds of Kashmiris.¹ Ray explains Operation Goodwill as employing “civic action as a tool to increase legitimacy of the military. In times when civil institutions are weak, these programmes are also intended to send the message that ‘to get things done’ the common person should turn to the military” (ibid.: xv). The perception of the Indian military in Kashmir nevertheless remains that it is an enemy force engaged in direct warfare against the Kashmiris and not welfare.²

Scholars critique the military in Kashmir, which faces extreme human rights allegations, for deploying the humanitarianism not as an altruistic act but as an attempt by the army to appear provident and munificent (Aggarwal 2004; Bhan 2013). This mode of functioning through goodwill projects is part of the structural violence. The humanitarian assistance is directed to build popular support for the government and marginalize the armed resistance. The humanist forms of counterinsurgency become “an attempt to normalize the brutality of the ‘realpolitik’” (Fassin as cited in

Bhan 2013: 9), where the lives, bodies, and identities of Kashmiris become subservient to India's national security.

Kashmiris have a dilemma of “choices” to make while living under a military occupation trying to ensure survival and safety. Even though the situation in Kashmir cannot be simplistically compared to a Nazi camp, the systemic impunity of the armed forces, to have absolute power to detain, arrest, maim, and kill, establishes a de facto camp in Kashmir. On the complexity of life inside a Nazi concentration camp, author and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi (Levi 1988) revealed how the prisoners had to “compromise and collaborate with their oppressors to varying degrees and with varying degrees of freedom of choice in exchange for preferential treatment” (StefCRAPS 2014: 203). He terms this a “grey zone” in which prisoners dwell for survival and safety. In such a system, Levi argues, everyone is a victim, which is not to ignore the degree of culpability. In these situations life becomes more about what Lawrence L. Langer (1980: 55) calls a “choiceless choice,” meaning that “crucial decisions did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of abnormal response and another, both imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim's own choosing.” Under Indian military occupation, the kinds of choices and choosing become problematic and shape the gendered Kashmiri subjectivity.

GODILL MAER : GOODWILL IS KILLING US

In 2011 the Goodwill project was revamped under the slogan of respectful humanism, declaring the Year of the Kashmiri Awam (people). The army slogan was changed from “Jawan aur awam, aman hai muqam [For the jawan and the people, peace is the goal]” to “Awam aur jawan, aman hai muqam [Putting the word people before soldiers].” The army emphasized that Operation Goodwill would be successful only when all Kashmiris feel Indian (Hasnain 2014). Beginning with Awami Sunwai (People's Court) to address the grievances of the common masses, multipronged programs focusing on schools, talent shows, and educational tours were stepped up

(Frontier Net 2013). Since 2008, sports have been developed as an alternate discourse to disengage youth from street resistance. While the Goodwill project is expanding, the army's direct modes of combat continue. What are the ethnographic contours of everyday Kashmiri life under militarized humanitarianism? Goodwill projects have enmeshed the military into people's daily lives, becoming a means to make militarization appear natural and even required in engineering people's will to integrate into India. The constructs of state power and normativity unite to dilute the brutal force that the military deploys inside Kashmir. The government's intention is to make the military appear provident, so the desire of freedom from India seems unnecessary.

It was the middle of a record-breaking cold winter. I was in a village in the northwest of Kashmir, which I call Azadpur. There is a sprawling military camp inside Azadpur and an even bigger one outside on a small hill overlooking the highway.³ The military presence dominates the village: surveillance occurs 24/7, including patrolling, checking at lookouts and bunkers, night raids, and crackdowns. If anyone has guests, they must be reported to the army or the police. This village has been nicknamed Chota Azad Kashmir (small independent Kashmir) for being strongly anti-India. Since 1989, many men from this village have joined the militant movement. During the 2010 uprising this village stood out from the rest of Kashmir when a forty-day curfew was imposed. Many casualties occurred during this period. Although the village is a hotbed of resistance where people are belligerent to Indian rule, the government has designated it a "model village." Under this status the government chooses an area in which to concertedly develop infrastructure, such as schools, a hospital, parks, and community facility centers like wedding halls. The Government of India's manual states that the model village program aims to minimize the rural-urban divide, check the migration, improve rural life, and introduce the latest technology.⁴

In 2011, when I visited the village, the model village project had been under way for five years. Army encounters with militants continued, including killings, harassment, and coercion of civilians, pillage, and

beatings. For no apparent reason, men and boys were rounded up once or twice a week and made to sit on their haunches for hours. Their cell phones were confiscated, and they were barred from talking to each other. Some were detained, and most were beaten and ultimately let off without explanation. The continuation of the military operations alongside the Goodwill and the model village projects seemed the moving parts of the government's carrot-and-stick policy. However, the people did not seem too swayed by these efforts.

The entry to the village is a huge archway displaying the village name. While this gated entry has become a model village hallmark, visible from afar, I did not see many other signs of development. The main road looked like it had been abandoned midway during construction. Shabir Mir, my research-host in the village (mentioned in chapter 2), complained that the road had been in a state of “making” for almost two years. When I asked the reason for this, he replied: “Hethez karaan yemen kya beyi? [They (the administration) do, what else do they have?]

The word *karaan* means “doing/to do,” but it is used here as an amalgam of resignation over something that should not, but will, happen (mostly as a result of some form of hegemony or stupidity). Shabir’s answer reflects the corruption and nepotism that are rife among the ruling elites and administration in Kashmir from which the army is not excluded.⁵ While India is indexed as the third most corrupt nation in the BRICs, Kashmir Valley also ranks high in a survey done by the Center for Media Studies-India (2017).⁶

We reached Shabir’s modest home, which was still unfinished. Inside, a chill pierced through the window, which was covered with plastic sheeting, a common method of creating insulation during the winter—and one that does not help much. Shabir apologized for the cold interior and handed me a *kanger* (hot coal brazier). It is a contraption comprising of a terra cotta pot nestled in a straw basket with a handle. People carry it inside their long wool robes, known as *pherans*. At Shabir’s house I was part of a meeting of village elders gathered to discuss the dental treatment of seventeen-year-old Mubashir, the son of Ruhi, a half-widow. The other people at the meeting were Rasheed Jan, the village headman; Ruhi’s paternal uncle,

Abdul Raheem; and his wife, Raja. Incidentally, Raheem's own son, Hatim, was also a victim of enforced disappearance. Ruhi's husband, Siraj, was also disappeared in custody. Siraj was a well-known Mujahid in the early 1990s. These were the initial days of *tehreek* (resistance against Indian rule). Siraj had been arrested by the Indian army in 1999 and was subsequently disappeared. Ruhi searched for her husband but found no clues. People believed that the army had killed Siraj, since he was a militant, which would give him little chance to be left alive. But having seen no dead body gave Ruhi hope. She became an activist with the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP).⁷

After Siraj's disappearance Raheem helped Ruhi find work on farms and in homes so that she could support her two sons. Ruhi's husband's share in his father's property got entangled in a dispute, and as a result, she became homeless. Many like her—unskilled and dependent—have fallen on hard times and rely on handouts from the local community. Property rights over their disappeared husband's share in their parental estates have emerged as a challenge for most half-widows. Prospects also depend on families. Despite the women like Ruhi who became homeless, there are those like Raheem's own "half-widow" daughter-in-law Sahar, who continues to live with the family. As Raheem puts it, he treats her "as if she were my own daughter."

Ruhi was fortunate to have a well wisher like Shabir, who offered her a free room in his house, where she lived for a couple of years. After bribing local officials, Shabir and Raheem helped secure Ruhi a job as a women's health worker at the village dispensary. Her eldest son, Mubashir, for as long as Ruhi could remember, had suffered from gum disease. Over the years his ailment worsened, and Ruhi had no money to pay for treatment. Always in pain, Mubashir could hardly eat anything, and as a result, he was emaciated. The doctor had advised surgery and a dental aid that would cost more than 6,000 Indian rupees, which Ruhi could not afford. Under Sadbhavana (the Goodwill project), however, the army's mandate had become to integrate military-civic activities, state administration, and community development plans. These include programs on education,

religion, culture, women's welfare, and health. One day Ruhi received a call from the commanding officer (CO) of the local army camp. The call came out of the blue, with the CO offering to get Mubashir treated at the army hospital for free. Even though Mubashir's predicament was known in the neighborhood, the call was telling of how the army keeps tabs on the intimate details of people's lives. "They have a dossier on almost everyone; even the guests that enter a home need to be reported to the police," said Ruhi. Since she was a militant's wife, surveillance on her was intense by default, and her sons were seen at high risk for joining the militancy.

Growing up, Ruhi's sons and by implication Ruhi (because she would accompany them) had been summoned to the army camp on and off. The officers termed these visits *khair-khabar/baat cheet* (asking welfare/tête-à-tête)—basically a method to keep tabs on them and their growing ideology. More worrisome to Ruhi, as her sons came of age, was that the army would influence them to join the counterinsurgents. Ruhi's younger son, Adil, like most Kashmiri children, was an avid cricket player, and under Sadhbhavana the army sponsored teams and organized matches. The CO was insistent in drilling into Adil that one day he "would play for his country, India, and become a hero." Ruhi believed this encouragement was more about trying to secure the child's loyalty than actual help.

One of the mainstays of the subconventional warfare with which the army is tasked is "generation of intelligence rather than its acquisition" (Ministry of Defence 2006). Rather than waiting, the emphasis is on proactively seeking intelligence. Thus, cultivating young Kashmiris, of all genders, as potential loyalists is aimed at making them part of the counterinsurgency. The army personnel were most persistent in offering Ruhi's sons free phones. She insisted that they were too young to have devices of their own, but she dreaded the time when she no longer had an excuse and her sons would be forced to receive these phones. She felt it was a trap to coerce the boys to join the counterinsurgency grid.

Back at the meeting of village elders at Shabir's house, the discussion about Mubashir's dental treatment was under way. Everyone in the room looked tense. Ruhi's eyes were crinkled, her lips pursed, and she twitched

her nose as if smelling something extremely foul. Raheem bookended his comments with the prescriptive and telling maxim, “We have to kill the snake and not break the stick.” He did not use the aphorism lightly. It underlines the dilemma of perilous choices they all made every day while living in chronic and deepening militarization. “Killing the snake without breaking the stick” means how not to anger the army if they turn down the offer and how to ensure that they stay safe.

A survivor of torture himself, Shabir knew the vagaries of not receiving the right treatment—his torture had made him handicapped. This is why, more so than others, he was trying to see the merit in the proposal, but even then he sounded half-hearted because the help was coming from the army. Distressed, Ruhi said: “I feel we really do not have a choice. If I do not accept their [army’s] help, they will think I am resisting because I am a Mujahid’s wife. Mubashir will suffer doubly; he will lose his teeth and maybe his life, because I know what they are capable of, and they will harass us to death. They are already eyeing my sons, anyway.” The discussion meandered around the haplessness of Kashmiris and ended without any decision. A few days later, the CO called Ruhi, not asking but “telling” her to check Mubashir into the hospital. “I had told you it was not an option,” Ruhi said. “It was an order. After their [army’s] gun, their *Godill* [a colloquial pronunciation of ‘goodwill’] is killing us.” Within a year it was clear that Mubashir’s operation had failed and he required corrective surgery.

SHABIR’S STORY

I return to Shabir, whose torture I analyzed as the killable Kashmiri body in chapter 2. Through military humanitarianism, is there an attempt to change the moral and legal color of the army’s originary violence and normalize the military presence in people’s lives? When I initially met Shabir, I observed that he sat with his elbow constantly pressed into his abdomen. Even though I knew he was a torture survivor, I had no idea about the extent of his injuries. In 1991, Shabir was a thirty-year-old up-and-coming farmer with

young children. The villagers held him in esteem and sought his opinion as they would from someone much older. He was known for his adherence to Islamic ideals as well as his progressive outlook. Shabir's travails began with the notorious "midnight knock." It has become common for the government forces to conduct raids (*chapeh*) during the night. These raids encompass a show of power, harassment, and humiliation for family members, who are often dragged from their beds, half-dressed. These raids become midnight spectacles that enact the military occupation's control over the intimate space of the home.

Jarring and deeply terrifying, the midnight knock is never an ordinary sound. I have heard it and it has forever stayed with me. Shabir too told me that even though years have passed, he still hears "the ramming of an iron bar into their fragile tin door." He gathered his wife and kids and hid them in the corner. Mustering all his courage, Shabir opened the door. The soldiers ordered him to announce that a crackdown was under way in the village. It has become common for soldiers to choose a person who is well known in the neighborhood or someone closely acquainted with the *masjid* , because it has a public address system, to do the announcement. The army regiment conducting the crackdown knew of Shabir not only because he was part of the *masjid* committee but also because he was quite active in aiding families when someone was arrested or summoned by the police or the army. He was also acquainted with some soldiers whom he saw during such errands.

During the crackdown, Shabir and other men were herded into a neighboring school compound. A CASO (cordon-and-search operation) involves an intense combing operation, which Shabir, like most Kashmiris, described as most "humiliating." Men are cordoned in a separate area and subjected to identification parades, which include beatings and harassment. There is usually a "cat"—a casual reference to the "informer" who is hidden inside an armored vehicle and identifies "the mouse," any militants or militancy sympathizers (Kak 2017). The men whom the "cat" separates from the crowd are arrested. The process is not foolproof, and many men unattached to militancy are also picked up and end up killed, tortured, or

wounded (Human Rights Watch 1993a). The crackdown can last for hours to days during which time women and young children stay in the houses. A contingent of soldiers will go from house to house checking for militants, weapons, and subversive literature. Since 2016, the Indian forces have been conducting shorter CASOs, which often include razing militant hideouts with explosives, targeted killing of the combatants, and mounting civilian casualties (OHCHR 2018).

During this particular crackdown, Shabir and one of his neighbors were held in custody, detained inside the school building in separate rooms. Shabir was subjected to intense interrogation involving torture from the get-go. The soldiers found flimsy reasons to intensify the punishment. He was asked about his ties to militancy, particularly “which militants he knew and how he aided them.” Since the names of the militants the soldiers mentioned were all young men from his neighborhood, Shabir said he knew “of them” but did not know them in the manner that was being alleged. He recalled that initially he had tried to reason with the soldiers, saying, “I’d be lying if I say I don’t know them; we all know who are the Mujahids in our village, but I do not know anything beyond that. No one in my family is a Mujahid. I am not helping anyone. You all know me; you see me in the village. Wasn’t I the one who was chosen to announce the crackdown? The CO knows me. I do not take part in the *tehreeki masleh* [matters of the Tehreek].” But Shabir’s arguments made no difference to the pattern of interrogation adopted by the soldiers.

Shabir said that every time he used the word Mujahid, an honorific title given to militants, the soldiers increased the torture and ordered him instead to use the Hindi term *oogarwadi* and *aatankwadi* (both mean “terrorist”). Shabir says he began using the word “militant” pronounced as “Milton,” also commonly used to refer to guerrilla fighters. Mostly Kashmiri media popularized the word “militant.” As a journalist named PB told me, using the word was a compromise they had to make between Mujahid and “terrorist.” PB explained: “Our media bosses in India, would not accept the word Mujahid that we use daily as Kashmiris, and our conscience did not

allow us to use the word ‘terrorist,’ because that is not what these fighters are, so we used the word ‘militant,’ which sounded somewhat neutral.”⁸

As the soldiers got increasingly brutal with Shabir, he deliberately began to use the Hindi word for terrorist to “save himself.” The soldiers got angry when he used the word *tehreek* (armed movement/revolution) and asked him to say *aatankwaad* (Hindi for “terrorism”). Shabir was forthcoming with the story of his detention in a secret prison, but it took him considerable time to tell me about the exact nature of what he classified as “torture.” It was not only because I was a woman that he could not bring himself to talk about it. On the basis on my education, travel, and researcher status, as well as the conversation we had around politics and life in general, he began to confide in me, treating me as a “beyond-gender” friend. The torture meted on him was a sexual assault. Studies have shown that most men especially in wartime refuse to talk about sexual violence, which may or may not include penetration by genitalia or objects and which causes sexual trauma and injury (Couturier 2012). The fear of being feminized, emasculated, and even branded a homosexual is real. In Kashmir, like in other war-torn places, the statistical analysis of sexual assault on men is not possible—they are scarcely reported, but it is an open secret. The survivors often narrativize these assaults as *sirf* (only) torture, which is what Shabir did when he finally gave me the details.

Shabir’s punishment initially included beating, running a roller on his thighs, and it increased to electric shocks including on his penis. As the days passed, he realized that the army had no intention of releasing him. He said that his torture seemed to be a *tamasha* (fun/spectacle) for the soldiers, just like “an evening TV show.” At night they gathered around the few interrogating him and drank liquor. One night a couple of soldiers held Shabir upside down and rammed the mouth of a glass bottle full of kerosene into his rectum. While still holding him upside down they thrust an iron rod into him, twisting it. Shabir says the pain was unbearable and he lost consciousness. When he woke up, he saw blood and feces oozing from his posterior. His abdomen felt as if it was on fire, and pain racked through his entire body. He groaned in anguish and pleaded for medical attention. A

soldier on duty replied that they could do nothing without orders. Later, a soldier gave him Calpol, a common over-the-counter medicine typically used for treating migraines. Even as he lay wounded and bloody, a soldier would randomly come by to kick or spit on him. They hurled abuses at him whenever he made a sound.

The punishment meted out to Shabir amounts to sexual assault since it involves penetration with a foreign object, yet he maintains it as *sirf* (only) torture. He looks heartbreakingly dignified, stroking his well-kept beard, as he delivers the incident in a matter-of-fact voice, keeping any emotional inflection at bay. He was held in secret detention for more than twenty-eight months, apparently on the suspicion of abetting militancy. Shabir knew he was being framed and never accepted the charge. During his incommunicado detention, even as he lay dangerously wounded, the physical and psychological torture continued. Many times, his interrogators threatened that his family would be kidnapped if he did not agree to his involvement. Once he was shown a bundle holding a few grenades, a packet of white powder (possibly narcotics), a pistol, and a passport. The interrogator told him that it was not a big deal to prove that he was guilty: “Imagine tomorrow your body will be found by the villagers with this little bundle hanging onto your wounded ass. Even your own family will have doubts, let alone the media.”

Shabir ultimately signed a document claiming that weapons had been recovered from him, but it did not change the behavior of the soldiers. They continued the routine of torture. During the time that he was incarcerated, his family knew nothing of his whereabouts—he was technically “disappeared.” Taja, his wife, recalls that the CO under whose command Shabir was initially detained told her that Shabir had been released that very day. The family frantically searched the area. After a few months the army began to deny that they had ever detained Shabir and told the family to approach the police to uncover Shabir’s whereabouts. It was a blatant lie, but Taja had no recourse. She tried to lodge an FIR (first information report) with the police, but the police rejected it. Shabir had disappeared, just like so many others in the region.

Months later, when an army regiment vacated a makeshift camp in another village, they left behind two prisoners, one of whom was Shabir. The villagers found him comatose with life-threatening injuries. The other man was also badly injured and struggling for his life. It seemed that the army had abandoned the two prisoners as potential dead bodies. Shabir spent months in a civil hospital and underwent five surgeries. Part of his intestine was removed, but his ailment grew worse. He could not find a successful treatment for his injuries, and a botched colostomy left him with a hole in his abdomen that continually oozes feces. As for the charges that had been made against him, he found no record of them. Shabir said that it could have been just intimidation or, had he recuperated, it might have been used against him. Thus it was just a ruse that had become the basis of Shabir's illegal detention. "I had *salamalaikum* with them," he said. To have *salamalaikum* is to be on a level where people exchange greetings with each other—meaning they know of each other, even if they are not friends or acquaintances. The army men in the area more or less knew Shabir and his engagements, which is also proven by the fact that they chose him to announce the crackdown. Yet Shabir was illegally detained, de facto disappeared, tortured, and sexually assaulted.

Regarding Shabir's continuously oozing wound, he told me: "This filth won't allow me to stay clean. If I go to the masjid, I cannot stay for long because I need to repeatedly clean myself. Some people avert their eyes to give me space; others snigger. This bulge under my shirt reminds not only me but everyone around me of how helpless and in danger we all are." It is well documented in literature on nationalisms, war, and state terror that the penetration of a detainee's body, while a mode of illicit torture, is also seen as symbolic of the material force of state power (see Feldman 1991; Malkki 1995; Aretxaga 1997; Das 2007). Shabir's body therefore appears as both an object of surveillance and a material inscription that reminds people what the military occupation is capable of. As Allen Feldman (1991) has stated in the context of the bodies of Irish Republican men who rose up against British hegemony, Shabir's body has been inscribed with "political action." His wound has gained material significance among his friends and

family. Shabir's body, returned from the world of the disappeared, began circulating as a reminder of what the government is capable of doing to Kashmiri bodies. The fact that the soldiers did not spare a well-recognized person like Shabir sent shock waves through the village. Such penalization serves as a representative threat to the community. The Kashmiri body is thus a primary political institution that the government desires to penetrate and control, through which a transformation of the political will of the Kashmiri people is seen as possible.

Shabir's life is constrained by the open wound on his body; he cannot eat well or travel easily. His movements are restricted; he said that his life is an open prison. He is always apprehensive about the embarrassing consequences of his wound. At social or religious functions he has to frequently excuse himself to wipe the ooze. In the Kashmiri tradition, persistent inquiry, sympathizing, and offering prayers for every little ailment are cultural habits that are seen as showing intimacy, care, and concern. Shabir is often asked about his health. To such queries, in a befitting cultural response, he dutifully mentions the status of the wound and sometimes, if the inquirer is new, he might relive the entire episode of torture, detainment, and disappearance. All this makes Shabir's body, as he expressed, "a reminder to me and others of what India can do even if one is 'innocent' of any subversive activity."

The reenactment of the torture of Shabir's body takes place each time his wound is viewed or mentioned or his treatment or life is discussed. People ask, "How could he have been punished so badly, since he is a *begunah* [innocent/without sin]?" This implies that he is a noncombatant. Use of the word *begunah* is fraught and needs explanation: it teeters on implying that the militants are either guilty or at least deserving of punishment, while people like Shabir, who have not taken up arms, are "sin-free" and should not be punished. However, this analysis would be reductive. There are other words in circulation, such as *Mujahid*, *tehreek*, and *azadi*, which point to the exalted status that the movement and the combatants have in the Kashmiri psyche. When I talked to Shabir about the word "innocent," he said: "Seeking *azadi* is not a crime; gun fights the gun,

and that does not make one *gunahgaar* [guilty].” In his case, Shabir said that *begunah* simply meant that he did not take up arms. The use of “innocent” in this manner is not meant to denigrate the armed movement and the sentiment to liberate Kashmir by armed struggle, but by implication the armed fighter becomes one who is “not innocent.”

This obliteration of meanings resonates with Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant’s (1992) “misrecognition,” which allows symbolic violence to hide itself within the dominant discourses. In this case the Indian government designates that the armed Kashmiri becomes “guilty, a traitor” and the unarmed Kashmiri can be termed “innocent.” Such categorizations have been assimilated in common discourse as contrary categories. However, the deployment of the word *begunah* is somewhat mechanical as well as contextual. People using this idiom even when they are not ideologically in agreement with the Indian discourse symbolizes fear, coercion, and violence applied to their bodies. The impetus behind the use of *begunah* by families is often to bolster the chances of getting a detainee released. Thus the discursive obliterations as exemplified by the use of *begunah* denote a symbolic violence, wherein the institutionalized modes of discipline and punishment have acquired an acceptable social value and curtail further thought about the violence involved in these practices.

In recent years the street fighters who have emerged in Kashmir, who are unarmed but use stones to pelt at the Indian forces, have been called “over-ground workers” and “agitational terrorists” by the Indian army and the government. The civilians who support the movement, especially those who write against Indian hegemony, have been labeled “ideological terrorists.” Almost all Kashmiris have steadily been brought under the rubric of “not innocent.” The more fundamental form of cultural violence inherent in the Indian state’s militarized violence is the eradication of one set of meanings, animating a way of life intended to clear the ground for another set. This resonates with what Catherine Lutz (2004) draws attention to when she states that militarization is also a discursive process that involves general shifts in societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimize the use of force. The army forcing Shabir to replace “Mujahid”

with “terrorist” points to the coercion that forces people to sanitize their daily language. Similar is the sentiment when people contextualize a person as *begunah* in the hope of a release or easier punishment. In front of soldiers, people will often deliberately say *milton* (militant) even if they privately say “Mujahid.” In addition, in face-to-face confrontations, Kashmiris will go out of their way to address the soldiers as “Sir,” thus trying to appear obedient.

At a safe distance, however, their language is replete with malediction for the soldiers and India. A description of emotions that the Indian forces evoke is seen in the private use of such terms as *hindustaen hoon* (Indian dogs), *daku* (robbers), or *vehshi* (beasts). The heavily militarized local Kashmiri police is seen in equally brutal light. The sanitization of language can be seen in Raheem who, even in private declarations inside the house, constantly said “killing the snake and not breaking the stick” to discreetly refer to the army as snakes, but without saying it, to ensure their safety. Thus the intense, panopticonic environment has caused the sanitization of language to trickle into daily life and conversation.

Returning to Shabir’s story, his first detainment was just the beginning of his arduous harassment by the army and police. After his release he tried painstakingly to piece together his life. He was arrested several more times and has often been summoned by the army and the police. Although handicapped, Shabir began to farm again. Once during planting season, while digging, he hit what he thought was animal fur. It turned out to be the head of a dead corpse someone had buried in his field in a shallow grave. Shocked beyond belief, Shabir ran to tell the villagers. He knew of a boy who had recently disappeared while in the army’s custody. Word of Shabir’s discovery reached the boy’s family; they went to the spot immediately, but it was not their son. Meanwhile, the army detained Shabir, asking him why he failed to contact the police first. They alleged that Shabir was trying to incite the villagers against the army, that he was part of an elaborate charade, where militants had killed the boy and were trying to frame the army. This was despite the fact that the murdered boy was from a

neighboring village and had indeed been picked up by the army during a raid on his family's house some months prior.

Surprisingly, despite the accusation, Shabir was released as suddenly as he had been arrested, but the army continued to pick him up for *pooch taach*, a euphemism for detainment, primarily for “questioning” by the army or the police. In *pooch taach* there are imminent, if not immediate, hopes for release, for broken bones, if not death, even though there are no guarantees. When Shabir was held for *pooch taach*, his home was raided and his family members, including his old father, beaten. “It was like they would want to remind us every day how much at their mercy we were,” said Shabir. Meanwhile his health deteriorated and the injuries he received during his frequent detentions gradually made farming impossible. Shabir opened a small grocery. The soldiers would often ransack the marketplace during raids, and Shabir's store would come under their attack. These incidents were random, meant to instill a routine of terror. Sometimes they were in retaliation of street-fighting youth or militant activities, like armed encounters and grenade attacks. “Such was the situation that I never put the goods back on shelves,” Shabir said, “knowing they [soldiers] would ransack the store again; I would ask people to pick what they wanted from the pile.” The soldiers often harassed Shabir for selling what they perceived as “subversive or incendiary literature”—books on Islam or any material written in Arabic. “Even Urdu school books,” he added. “They just found flimsy reasons; the *jawans* [army men] always found ways to create *dahshat* [terror].”

Since Operation Sadbhavana took hold in the region, the army has frequently interjected into Shabir's life for another reason: medical treatment. One day, just like when Ruhi received a call, the CO of the army camp summoned Shabir. He offered Shabir medical help to correct his failed surgeries. Shabir said that even though he did not want to accept the proposal, he had to pretend to go along with it: “How could I refuse? It was *jabri* [by force]. My disagreement would mean I was rejecting the army and, by implication, I was loyal to the resistance.” Shabir found that the medical help the army had arranged was merely a pretense: “They were

sending me to doctors I had already consulted; it seemed like they receive funds to do this kind of work and they need names to show they have done something.” The CO would write *parchis* (a colloquial name for quick notes on paper) and refer Shabir to various doctors and medical facilities. “It was as if such a treatment was being availed to me for the first time,” Shabir remarked, “as if the army was my greatest sympathizer.”

Shabir has filed cases against the army in the high court and the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC), which are languishing. The army has not responded to the court summons, but over the years Shabir has been secretly propositioned to settle out of court. He told me that his fight to bring the perpetrators to justice is the last thing on his mind, and it will not happen anyway. The army’s show of “seeking him to find treatment” was frustrating but he could not do anything about it. This new type of engagement with the army was disconcerting to Shabir, for whom it seemed that the perpetrators were trying hard to appear as saviors. Thus his torture was medicalized; the original incident of the brutal violence meted out on his body was being obliterated. The mode of conversation between Shabir and the army personnel changed from “torture” to “treatment,” which seemed to justify or legitimize the military’s intervention in Shabir’s life. It seemed to be a concerted effort to erase the reality of the illegal and violent treatment meted out to him by the army.

OUR WORLD IS AN OPEN PRISON

Azadpur has a large population, and the people have been demanding a hospital for a long time. When the state administration finally authorized the hospital, the different hamlets within Azadpur did not agree on the chosen location. Each wanted the hospital in closer proximity to them. What followed the disagreement illustrates how the civil and military apparatuses are enmeshed and how the Indian armed forces impose themselves on community life. The army personnel dominated the civil administrators and became the sole arbiters of the issue. Instead of meetings being held in the offices of the district administration, they were moved to

the local army camp. This troubled many villagers, who were not prepared to enter the army camp, in this case for civil matters. Yet there were some people more than willing to work with the army.

Historically, army camps across the region of Kashmir have been dreaded places of detainment, torture, and death. There is great trauma associated with entering such camps as well as social stigma. Shabir called his experience *ajeeb* (strange/surreal) in that “I was sitting like a human across from an army officer and not groveling for my own or someone else’s release.” His thoughts would wander to his days of detainment and torture, and he would pinch himself to confirm that he was not dreaming or that he was not a prisoner. According to Shabir, he would often be “trembling internally.” While these discussions were being held, the raids and surveillance continued. Shabir said: “Aes gaayy baawre [We went crazy]; one day we would be summoned for a meeting about the hospital, and the next day we would be running to the same camp to find out about the whereabouts of young men and plead for their release. It became a double torture for most of us.” Thus, while the army carried out a forcible engagement on civil matters, interfering in day-to-day governance, the counterinsurgency policies did not cease. The villagers said the army’s frequent interventions were a ruse to create an engagement with people. Shabir called it forging a method for *bithlagai* —that is, a face-to-face confrontation forcing people to mingle or to engage on a daily basis to make them dependent on the military and to normalize the militarization.

In the end, the army officers overrode everyone’s wishes and imposed a location for the hospital that everyone dreaded. I use the word “imposed” deliberately because according to the villagers, the army did not merely propose the location but identified it to ensure compliance in the long run. The army chose a stretch of land located behind their camp. This meant that in order to reach the hospital, one would have to first pass the camp. “No one could say yes to that,” Shabir said. “It was a very clever way of making people say *salaam* [salutary greeting] to them first and then see the doctor.” The villagers tried to appeal to the civil administration for an intervention, but they did nothing to override the army’s proposal. Even though they

were desperate for the hospital, the people of Azadpur went silent on the issue. “We might have some differences,” Shabir said, “but as Kashmiris we are all one heart against the Indian military occupation; we could not have our mothers and daughters passing the camp every time they needed to see the doctor, nor our sons, or our elders; we deliberately went mum on the issue; we chose *izzat* [honor] before *sehat* [health].”

Despite the people’s desire for distance from the military encampment, the troops are a constant presence across the village and the entire Kashmiri landscape. In remote regions the military (and in cities and towns, the paramilitary and police) are stationed everywhere—in alleys, on doorsteps, on the roads, and in the fields and orchards. In the countryside it is common to find a contingent of soldiers standing guard close to where people are working in the fields or busy with their day-to-day trade. Under the project of winning hearts and minds, the army also intervenes in the cultural life of the village. Shabir mentioned the *iftaar* (breaking of fast at sunset) dinner that the army hosts during the holy month of Ramazan (Muslim month of fasting). Shabir summed up the event, held on the army campground:

May God forgive me, it is like breaking fast by eating *guss* [feces]. . . . Inside our lads are bathed in blood and outside they make a show of breaking bread with us. What calamitous time is upon us? We Kash- miris love eating, but in their events I eat with fear; my friends and I lurk there like *bhoot* [specters/ghosts], talking and smiling when they smile at us. That time is an agony. I think I prefer a direct beating than to have to fake camaraderie. There was one CO who would even pray with us; we later came to know he was not even a Muslim. Sadbhavana [the Goodwill project] is all part of their [the army’s] *makarel* [hypocrisy/playacting].

The word *makar* in Kashmiri is used to describe a person who is a hypocrite—someone who has a covert agenda and uses sly tactics to gain selfish outcomes. A *makar* is wont to engage in *makarel*—a sort of repertoire or play acting without appearing confrontational or adversarial to the perceived opponent. Shabir explained further:

One day the army is beating us, the next day they call us for *iftaar* . It is mind-boggling. There are opportunists among us who benefit from the army, but generally most of us are disturbed. One day they crack down, and the next day the CO summons all the sick people to

the medical camp. If the patients don't go, the soldiers come and round them up. Some people in the village are poor and go willingly for the medical help. As a village elder, my tragedy is that I am forced to ensure people go or there will be repercussions. At the camp they will take pictures with us. Once they gave medicines to the patients and once the photo shoot was over, they took the medicines back. The army is putting their "leg" into every part of our life. Our world has been made a bigger prison now. *Mera katil hi mera munsif hai. Kya mere haq mein faisla de ga* [My murderer is my advocate too. What verdict will be given that is in my favor]?

Asif, Shabir's nineteen-year-old neighbor, also had an interesting story about the Sadhbhavana *iftaar* dinner. It had been his first time inside the camp in a friendly event. He said that he had never seen soldiers in such a "normal" situation before, referring to the fact that they were not on duty carrying guns. While getting food, Asif had reflexively jumped when a soldier raised his arm to ladle out lentil soup to him. He misunderstood the gesture, thinking the soldier was about to hit him. While the soup went flying all over the place, the telling anecdote does not end there. Asif added: "The soldier, instead of beating me, calmly handed me a napkin. His face was friendly." For days Asif told his friends that he had witnessed a *maujza* (miracle): a soldier who did not beat him.

THE WEB OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

Abdul Raheem, Ruhi's uncle, had arranged a prayer gathering to be held on the tenth anniversary of his son Hatim's disappearance. In addition to family and friends, Shabir and Ruhi were also part of the function, and we all visited together. Upon entering the family's home, even before we finished the obligatory greetings, Sahar, Hatim's wife, appeared with tea and biscuits. The room smelled of incense, and a few people sat in prayer. A huge tent in the courtyard had been pitched for the lunch guests. The teacup in which I was served tea seemed odd to me. It was not the kind Kashmiris usually use for guests. It was the cheap, handle-less type used by quick roadside eateries, more commonly used by non-Kashmiris. Intrigued, I remarked that such glasses were not generally used to serve tea in Kashmiri homes. Raheem said that, at any given time, the family stocks more than

eighty such cups in the house. He explained: “The army raids us frequently. During the raids they [soldiers] demand tea. Earlier, we would have to wander the neighborhood gathering enough cups. Then I realized I’d better get the *dhaba* glass; it is one less worry. These cups are also smaller, so we have to make a smaller quantity of tea, and the soldiers can have as many cups as they like.”

Raheem was proud of his resourcefulness. Reports of the troops demanding tea, water, or food during raids and crackdowns were rife throughout the 1990s and continue in some places. Many times, offering tea and biscuits to the armed forces is also voluntary on the part of the civilians, who mean to offer hospitality in the hopes of allaying any potential violence. In Raheem’s household, being prepared for soldiers had become routine. The action of stocking cups for the soldiers who would come for the purpose of arrest or interrogation and ransack the house seemed like a natural and even necessary thing to do, because compliance was nonnegotiable. This seemingly inane and practical gesture on Raheem’s part exemplifies the deep violence that militarization has inflicted on the Kashmiri social and cultural order. This captures a certain decimation of an integral subjectivity that cannot stand up to the counterinsurgency policies but must succumb to the direct violence and undergirding structural violence. People adjust behaviors and expectations to reduce the threat to their lives.

Even though being hospitable is of utmost value in the Kashmiri culture and visitors are made offers of food to the point of consternation, the act of Raheem stocking the cups reflects the deep-seated violence meted out on the Kashmiris. Despite the beatings and humiliation that accompany the raids, Raheem must succumb to the soldiers’ demands in all possible manners. The act of forced hospitality has become normalized, even required. It is telling of a structural violence inflicted on the subjugated people. The act of storing cups is not violent in itself, but when I beheld the eighty glasses sitting neatly in a box in Raheem’s pantry, I imagined retracing the steps that led to the buying of the cups: Where do they take us but to the military ramparts? In the social and political lives of Kashmiris,

new layers of such cup-stocking activities have been added that make the military occupation's originary violence opaque. As Johann Galtung (1975: 113–14) has explained of structural violence that allows the entrenchment of a deep-seated militarization, it “is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power.” In contrast to direct violence, where an actor is seen to commit violence, structural violence does not require a manifest actor and the violence can be indirect and even symbolic.

The other significant side of Raheem's life is his son Hatim's disappearance. Hatim was not just a civilian but also a constable in the local police department. After many years of trying for a government job—seen as the most dependable mainstay in Kashmir—Hatim had struck a deal with a local official. Corruption is so institutionalized that such dealings are viewed as mandatory for achieving a certain end. Raheem provided the money for the bribe that Hatim paid to get employed. This manner of employment is so pervasive that there is even a term for it: a “backdoor entry.” It means that the person was employed or promoted through underhanded dealings or sheer nepotism. In his private life Hatim was an active member of an Islamic order that propagated ideals of worship, values, and moral codes, and he had no links with the armed resistance.

Raheem started to worry the day Hatim began to grow a beard: “I knew the army would pick on him; I begged him to stay clean shaven, but he was adamant, saying it was the Sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him.”⁹ The Indian forces in Kashmir have long targeted Muslims whom they suspect of advocating a strict interpretation of Islam, because they believe they are also pro-resistance (see Human Rights Watch 1999). Most of those who have been arbitrarily arrested have been reported to be bearded and within the age of twenty to thirty-five years old (Choudhury and Moser-Puangsuwan 2007). The beard has become a marker of either being a sympathizer of militancy or a militant, not that nonbearded persons are not targeted. In 2010 “beard” became the highlight in a fake encounter, which the army staged in Machil, a remote region in the Kashmir Valley. After killing three local Kashmiri boys, the army attempted to pass them off as

foreign “Islamic” militants by painting a black beard on the face of the youngest victim (Jaleel 2017).

Hatim frequented the local masjid for prayer meetings, but his job prevented him from traveling with the group for missionary work. He began complaining that the soldiers were stopping him often when he went to work or to the masjid. Raheem encouraged Hatim to answer the soldiers confidently now that he was also part of the police force. Raheem did not think much of the few times Hatim was summoned by the CO to the camp. The army officer seemed to be curious about the group’s activities. “Hatim was a policeman, technically their [the army’s] own man,” Raheem said. “Being a Kashmiri father, I was worried, not too much though. But the God’s honest truth is that even if a Kashmiri works in the counterinsurgency grid, let alone the police, the Indians always suspect us [Kashmiris] of being linked to the resistance. They do not trust Kashmiris; they might pretend to, but we all know they do not. They have not even spared pro-India politicians among us.”

One day, Hatim left home on his bicycle to pick up clothes for his two children from the tailor, and never returned. He had been seen entering the army camp along with his bicycle. The family went through the usual rigors of searching when someone fails to return home and disappears. Raheem tried to file an FIR based on eyewitness accounts, but the police rejected it. In turn, the police and the army regiment propagated the story that Hatim had been secretly aspiring to be a militant and had fled to Azad Kashmir for arms training. Hatim’s status as a policeman, who was on active duty, did nothing to convince the army or the police to drop the accusation. Gradually, the army, the police, and the Special Task Force militia, whom Raheem called “thugs,” bolstered the story that Hatim was a full-fledged, active militant. Their versions varied—which included either Hatim going into hiding or leading the guerrilla activities. Raheem called the allegations against Hatim preposterous. He said that Hatim was a busy family man who, because of his job, could not even travel for missionary work or help with the farm work, let alone be secretly leading a guerrilla outfit. Raheem reasoned that the entire twenty-four hours of Hatim’s day were accounted

for. He was in the office most of the day and then at home, except two times when he offered morning and late-night prayers—an activity that took less than forty minutes. “If Hatim had decamped,” he added, “why would he have left his weapon behind?”

The army behaved as if they believed what Raheem called their own *daleel* (a fictional tale) about his son. They frequently raided Raheem’s house, demanding that the family produce Hatim. The intensity of the raids and constant summoning to the camp and questioning was such that Raheem and his wife seriously began to wonder if Hatim had fled to join the armed resistance. There is precedence across the valley, not in their village though, that policemen had decamped with a weapon and joined the armed struggle. Desperate, they began asking Hatim’s friends at the masjid, who assured them that they had seen no such sign of this. They pleaded with Sahar to recall any suspicious behavior, and scoured through Hatim’s papers and other personal belongings for clues.

The army kept threatening the family with dire consequences if they did not produce Hatim. Scared, Raheem sent Sahar and her children to her parents’ house for safety. He and his wife left home. For three months they posed as beggars, roaming the frontiers near the LoC making enquiries. They surreptitiously handed pictures of Hatim to people, asking if anyone had seen him in the area with contingents of men and boys going into Azad Kashmir. They got no answers. Raheem said that it was not so much their conviction that Hatim had crossed the Line of Control (LoC); they were desperate to convince the army that they were trying everything in their power to find Hatim. They had wanted to get some proof that he was *begunah* (innocent). As they found no clue, for some time Raheem’s wife was assuaged by the assumption that Hatim had really fled to join the movement. “I let her think that for a while, because what was the other option? That Hatim was disappeared by the army,” Raheem said. “Since they were denying his detainment, I fathomed that she would naturally fear the worst: that he was dead. So I let her be. Slowly, she came around but is ailing with hypertension hoping for Hatim’s return.”

From the day of Hatim's disappearance, Raheem's household came fully under the army's radar. He said:

In the past ten years, they must have had tea by the barrels at our house and must have broken hundreds of glasses. They come unannounced, as if my house is their *matamaal* [maternal grandfather's home]. When a new CO takes over, it seems that Hatim's file is the first thing he looks at, because no sooner does he join, that fresh raids and interrogations begin. For us it is painful, as if Hatim disappears anew. It has become a ritual now. We prepare beforehand. I make sure I am around, so that our women- folk don't confront the soldiers alone. They will beat my younger son, Basit, badly, so he has learned to take leave in advance from his college. If he cannot, his friends know what to do. We can't keep him away in safety because the army demands his presence. They hold us in different rooms for questioning. My biggest worry is for Sahar. She has gone through so much after losing Hatim. Then this [raids/questioning], over and over. . . . They taunt her with insinuations, asking her where she meets my son, and when he comes home. But God as our witness, they disappeared him. They are only using this as a pretense to create terror in our life. My family has been made an example of how much *dehshat* [terror] they can create.

Raheem was not exaggerating when he said that the army and police watch their every move. Sahar's youngest child was a few months old when Hatim disappeared. Before that, she had had two miscarriages, and after delivery she was diagnosed with uterine cysts and was subsequently undergoing treatment. She said that almost every time she visits a gynecologist for a checkup, the army raids their home. They seemed to connect her visits to the gynecologist with spousal sexual activity. Sahar said that the soldiers brazenly ask her "to show them the hideout where she sleeps with her husband." She has been interrogated many times inside her home, often isolated from the other members in a separate room. She has been asked all kinds of *behaya* (shameless) questions. Raheem grew furious when he recalled the times Sahar had been subjected to rough interrogation. He and his wife have many times pleaded with the army that someone be allowed to chaperone Sahar in the room, to no avail. Once Sahar was detained alone in her own bedroom from dusk till dawn while other family members were held separately. Some were kept busy in the kitchen making tea. They saw soldiers taking liquor inside the room.

His voice breaking with emotion, Raheem said: "I watched—we all did — helpless. I was made to wear bangles [metaphorically]; my daughter-in-

law, honor of my son and my lineage, was alone all night with the beasts. All night, she was made to answer question after question. Not even God came to our rescue.” Raheem called it the longest and most grueling night of his life—more excruciating than Hatim’s disappearance. “Kabebeh hez karekh aseh [They skewed us like kebabs],” he said with resignation. The metaphor of “wearing bangles” connotes that the men of his family (including him) were feminized to the point of obedience and restraint (by the army). Raheem emphatically mentioned that all night Sahar was answering questions, thus discreetly sidelining the possibility of physical assault. The Indian armed forces in Kashmir have committed rapes, which have been categorized as a crime of war by Human Rights Watch (1996). While it is a well-documented fact that the army is responsible for mass rapes and sexual assault, it is also true that many cases go unreported, and those that are reported often end in the perpetrators being exonerated (see Batool et al. 2016; Imroz et al. 2012).

As for Sahar, as a half-widow, she seemed to go about her life with stoicism. She remained focused fully on her children and the household duties. She never mentioned this incident to me in detail, except in passing, summing her experience as *zyadti hez karekh*. This phrase can mean anything from the soldiers forcing themselves on her sexually to excessively torturing her. The word *zyadti* (meaning “force/forcibly”) is a euphemism indicating anything from simple harassment to molestation but can also indicate rape. Raheem, in a matter-of-fact way, told me that when the soldiers left, they found Sahar disheveled and distraught. She was incoherent, “not even crying,” sitting on her haunches, clutching her chest, her scarf on the floor. In a fit of rage, Raheem lunged at the departing contingent and was tossed into their vehicle. Basit was also dragged along, and both were detained for a week. It was made explicit to the men that they would not approach the police or any higher-up about the incident. Upon their return home, Raheem and Basit resumed household duties, and the incident was not talked about. The individualized “torture” of Sahar is often mentioned as part of the family *kismat* (fate/destiny). Threatened by the army, they of course did not approach the police, whom they knew

would not help, nor did they talk about the incident to anyone. This silence is not “ignoring” the gendered assault but becomes a strategy, a form of “social protection.” If word of Sahar’s individualized assault were to get out, a flurry of social gossip could make her life doubly excruciating.

While this was happening, Raheem’s household was under another assault. An *ikhwanee* (renegade militiaman) in cahoots with the army—let’s call him H—who was notorious in the region had encroached on Raheem’s rice paddy land. He had slyly moved the dividers between their adjacent fields and usurped a few feet of the family’s land. The militiaman had probably assumed that the family was too besieged to notice, and once they did, they would be too frightened to take cudgels to him. The renegade, it seemed, had become invincible in their area. It was rumored that he was joining a pro-India political outfit. No one in the community was ready to arbitrate the matter, and Raheem was advised to turn a blind eye, which he did. The man, H, had also floated a story that the strip of Raheem’s farm had always been disputed between the two families, and that Raheem’s grandfather had forcibly taken it during his childhood. No one countered his version of the story, but everyone knew it was a blatant lie to justify the land grab. However, this was not the end of H’s interference with Raheem’s household, and losing land began to look like “small potatoes.” H started constantly summoning Basit to the army camp, where he would be talked into joining the Special Task Force (STF). H told Basit that it was a sure way to prove their family’s allegiance to the army and “ease the curse of Hatim’s militant links,” which meant that the raids and constant surveillance could subside. H acted as if he had extreme goodwill toward the family. He professed that he had recently proved his goodwill when he “took back his land silently and spared taking them to court.” The family was dumbstruck but could hardly give any response but silence.

One of H’s arguments to convince Basit to join the STF was that being in the militia could ease finding Hatim’s actual whereabouts. While they knew this was a ruse, Basit and Raheem thought it was tantamount to the army admitting that they had taken Hatim after all. But whatever the case, Raheem worried that he was watching a familiar pattern unfold. It is well

documented that the army and renegades have lured many teenagers and young men with the promise of a job either in the militia or as a daily wage. These men have ended up being bodies in fake encounters. A landmark case indicating this policy came to light in 2010, when the Machil fake encounter was exposed (Mathur 2016). This case has since become an example of how the army and renegade nexus uses the bodies of boys, lured or otherwise, presenting them as foreign militants killed in fake encounters. Raheem was worried that he was about to lose his other son as well.

After completing his bachelor's degree, Basit had been unable to get a government job, which is considered to be the most dependable of careers in Kashmir. With investment from Raheem, Basit had started a fertilizer business and was planning to set up shop in Srinagar. Even though it meant losing his right-hand man, Raheem thought it was the best plan to end the army's interest in Basit. Raheem had devised a plan to put it into action. One morning, Basit discreetly left, pretending to go for a doctor's appointment in the city. He stayed with a friend and looked for an apartment. He had been gone for less than a week when the army launched a raid on the house. The army alleged that Basit was absconding and had joined militancy, just like his brother. Raheem pleaded that Basit was receiving treatment for an ailment in the city and would return once the treatment was complete. To prop his story, Raheem had to arrange for Basit to be admitted to the government hospital. Finally, Basit was forced to return. In time, he gave in to the constant harassment and joined the STF.

Raheem did not accept this as Basit's fate; he hoped that it was a stopgap arrangement till he could find a way to get him back. He feared that if Basit had not joined, he would be framed or killed, and he was painfully aware that this decision had tainted Basit socially. The STF cadre is socially ostracized; its members are seen as the lowliest of traitors, bordering on murderers and extortionists, who are against their own people. Raheem tried hard to find someone in the civil administration to help in getting Basit out. The only person who was somewhat in a position to intervene was his cousin, Aseer Ahmed, area leader of a pro-India party that formed the government at that time. Aseer lived in Srinagar, in a gated enclave, a green

zone meant for politicians and administrators, with round-the-clock security. His intervention did not produce any immediate results for Basit; instead, Aseer began coaxing Raheem to join his party. He told Raheem that having some measure of political clout would provide safety to his family and could be used as leverage to get Basit back.

For the majority of Kashmiris, maintaining a distance from pro-India politics is a default choice. Kashmiri members of pro-India parties are often called *gaddars* (traitors)—“those who prop up and nurture the Indian administration and its brutality in Kashmir,” as Raheem put it. In the early 1990s, with militancy on the upswing, pro-India politicians were threatened by the militants, even killed. Most continue to live in garrisoned areas and move about under maximum security. In time, Raheem realized that recruitment to the political party was a precondition for receiving Aseer’s patronage. “It was a tough time,” he said. “He [Aseer] was the only one here [in the area] who could pick up a phone and talk to the army people, even if they did not listen to him, but still . . . he had some measure of where-withal. I hate India . . . but I needed some support to ensure my family was safe. It was *majboori* [desperation], because no one listens to an ordinary Kashmiri today.” After Raheem joined the pro-India party, it took months of pleading with the party higher-ups and applying pressure on H and his army bosses. After eight months Basit was dismissed.

At the heart of the aspirations of the Kashmiri resistance—be it as the majority (which seeks independence) or the minority (which wants a merger with Pakistan)—there is a strong overlap of abhorrence for integrating with the Indian federation and a deep hatred for its army, collaborators, and politicians inside Kashmir. Raheem’s life events and decisions are illustrative of the direct and indirect violence that is woven into the structure of Kashmir’s polity. He has had to buy patronage by selling his loyalties, when he clearly does not feel or aspire to be an “Indian.” In some historical accounts Kashmiris have been painted as cowardly, greedy, and lazy. A revisionist analysis attributes such perspectives to the colonial bias that discounts the near slavery-like conditions of Kashmiris under foreign rules. However, the contemporary Indian political elite and media portray

Kashmiris as having a default tendency for physical violence, the evidence of which is seen in them having taken up arms. The desire for independence is deemed irrational. Thus, the Goodwill efforts “invisibilize” and “normalize” the counterinsurgency apparatus.

Many average people, like Raheem and Basit, or Ruhi or Shabir, are caught in the quagmire of pro-India politics that is bent on countering the resistance in the form of militancy or otherwise. People who are suffering like Raheem have no route but to find some form of safety net for survival. This is not to say that all Kashmiris succumb to direct Indian patronage, be it through political parties or the army through coercion, but there are people who seek to derive power and social status with scant regard to the fraught politics. However, in this particular ethnographic account, people like Raheem and Basit appear as reluctant “collaborators.” Many, like Shabir, are covert resisters when they choose to support the resistance tacitly, even as they are not involved in its activities.

In these shadows Kashmiri subjectivities appear as palimpsests, with layers of forcible scribbles made by the Indian military occupation upon the undying aspirations of freedom. The palimpsest is full of obliterations, under partial erasure, ready to be written over and changed. Life becomes a manifestation of Raheem’s favorite maxim: “killing the snake and not breaking the stick.” In their larger narrative propagated by India’s national media and politicians, people like Raheem are propped up as exemplars of pro-India sentiment in Kashmir. Again, this is not to say that those who lend support to India or who see their future with India do not exist. But in the Indian narrative, little regard is paid to the complexity of choices that people like Raheem have to make and their reasons for adhering to the politics they choose. Raheem expressed his predicament as “waaw wetcheh naaw trawin, shubi ne magar kya karow [to sail your ship in the direction of the wind].” He adds, “Shubi ne magar kya karow,” that it is not an honorable thing to do, but it has to be done even when it generates morally complex situations.

Thus it becomes a mechanism for the government and its forces to control people and to create a pro-India political ground. Raheem, who has

been a victim of extreme persecution in all aspects of his life, had to join a pro-India political party to access a form of safety. After much suffering, he has been categorized as an Indian collaborator by his community. These are choices he might not have had to make had Kashmir been free of the military occupation. And even if Raheem had had the personal ambition of becoming an opinion leader or a powerful voice in his village, he would have had bona fide channels that did not compromise his ethics and his integrity and malign his competencies.

Raheem continues to stay in touch with the APDP activists. Earlier, he shared a strong bond with some of them, but now his pro-India party affiliation has become an impediment. He will still sometimes, on an impulse, visit the APDP office to catch up on the news. He cannot help sometimes but hang around the protests; however, he slinks away before the media can catch him. He said that he stays away even though his heart is in the protest, because he does not want to “taint the movement [of the APDP]” by his presence; at the same time, he does not want his party bosses to know he still has loyalties to the APDP, which implies resistance to India. Raheem is still in touch with human rights activists inside and outside of Kashmir, as well as writers, filmmakers, journalists, and activists with whom he has met during the course of his search for Hatim. He is a go-to person when information is needed from his area. He is careful not to expose his liaisons, knowing the army and police are suspicious of divulging any information to media and researchers. The day when a researcher or a media person approaches Raheem for an interview, he remains ready to be summoned to the police or army camp for an inquiry into this person’s motives. Such behavior is odd, Raheem said, since any visitor coming inside the village is always questioned beforehand. He interprets this extra scrutiny as the high-handedness of the army and the police.

Over the years, although Raheem has become freer to keep in touch with the media because of his party activities, he still hides his little phone book, visiting cards, and bits of paper with names and numbers in a box behind the shoe cupboard to keep the army from getting at them during any

potential raid. It is almost as if he is waiting for the other shoe to drop. In the past the soldiers have looted his safe and taken money, jewelry, and other valuables. Most of the documents pertaining to property and Hatim's disappearance have also been destroyed. The only remembrance of Hatim the family has left is a laminated photograph that hangs high near the ceiling. Sahar said that the army took all of Hatim's clothes, including his police uniform. "They even tore my grandson's homework . . . every last piece of paper in this home; they left no sign, so I hide these," said Raheem, pointing to the box. "These, I keep safe," he added. "We might need them some day. I am not naïve."

Raheem has discreetly revealed the locations of unidentified graves of men killed by the army to human rights activists. His face revealed pain and urgency as he extended his hands, saying, "With my own bare hands, I have opened burlap sacks containing bodies cut into pieces. And the army would demand we bury them. How can I forget? We Kashmiris need to expose them [the army and the government], but the time is not ripe; the winds are against us. Right now, the snake is too strong; our stick will break." In this space of his contrasting connections, Raheem has become a quintessential "troubling and troubled" figure. He is in the realm of the gray zone of collaboration to get some preferential treatment and escape the army's wrath. He could be seen somewhat as belonging to the category of *sonderkommandos*, a category of prisoners Primo Levi (1988: 38) mentioned in the context of those in Auschwitz who got special jobs and seemed better off. However, ultimately they did not escape the fate of the other prisoners. Their maximum use was four months, after which they were exterminated to ensure no secrets went out. Superimposing the rubric of the *sonderkommandos* on the collaborators in Kashmir would be simplistic, but it is also a close paradigm to think of when we consider people who willingly or unwillingly collaborate with the Indian apparatus and make choices in a situation of extreme coercion.

Zygmunt Bauman (2000) has reflected on the choices that were available to prisoners in the Nazi camps between a high level of coercion and minimal options—inherently illustrating that there were no good choices.

Similarly, Raheem's pro-India political connections and Basit's STF links make Raheem a pariah in his community. As the father of a forcibly disappeared son who is alleged to be an absconding militant, Raheem is suspect in the eyes of the army and is never accepted as being truly pro-India. Despite his party status, during his daughter's wedding the soldiers laid a siege around his home for four days. The army regiment lay in wait for Hatim, believing he would sneak in to bless his sister. The cordon around the house was so heavy that the bridegroom's family was too scared to attend the reception and fetch the bride. Raheem pleaded with the army and asked his cousin Aseer to intervene. "Not even a low-ranking official took Aseer's call," Raheem recalled. "They accused him of impeding their duties and siding with the militants. They called him a terrorist in a politician's guise for advocating to lift the siege." With the cordon around Raheem's house, the bridegroom could not attend his own wedding. Contrary to tradition, Raheem himself took his daughter to her in-laws' house.

Raheem's pro-India political connections and Basit's brief stint with the STF have led to Raheem's further isolation from his own community. His close friends understand the predicament, but having a connection with the family has become complicated. Some of the friends and neighbors with whom I had a chance to talk about this contextualized Raheem's decision as *majboori* (coercion). But other community members are unforgiving: "Netchuw sindiss khoonas korun souda; pateh kya goyuw izah osus laagan [He sold his son's blood; it should not have mattered that he was harassed by the army]." The pro-India connection and the STF link have become a heavy social burden. Raheem said that there are times when he attends the masjid and he can see that people shy away from him. This is unlike before, when he was a confidant to everyone. At the same time, because of his connections, others seek him out when they need help cutting bureaucratic red tape or need help with the local police or small favors from the government.

Raheem believes that even with his stint with the STF over, Basit's fortunes have been compromised. He has become a social outcast of sorts.

Even though Basit's close friends understand the compulsions that led him join the STF, they cannot maintain ties with him for fear of being seen as "friends" with those who collaborate with the Indian apparatus. They want to stay away from Basit to ensure that they do not come under the army's active radar by association, if possible. Also, the fear of militant groups who see Basit as an adversary, even if not an active one, is a factor. Basit had worked hard to stay within the camp's grounds and not join the raiding parties. Knowing his father was working on getting him out of the STF, he thought his low-key participation would help ease his transition back into the community. Low-key or not, the stigma of being with the STF is pervasive.

Basit was again thinking of relocating from his village, even though he had no prospects. His old business had gone bankrupt. Raheem wanted Basit to help with the farm and felt that staying at home might prove safer for him. The only person supporting Basit in his plan was Shabir, who thought it was the best way for him to start afresh and that he might get some job opportunities. Shabir's own son, Aala, barely escaped being forced into joining the STF. After finishing college, Aala started a photocopying business, sharing the small space in Shabir's grocery store, which was not running too well. Even though Aala had qualified for a government job, he had been unable to get a No Objection Certificate (NOC), which is issued after a background check and is mandatory for securing employment, loans, and passports.

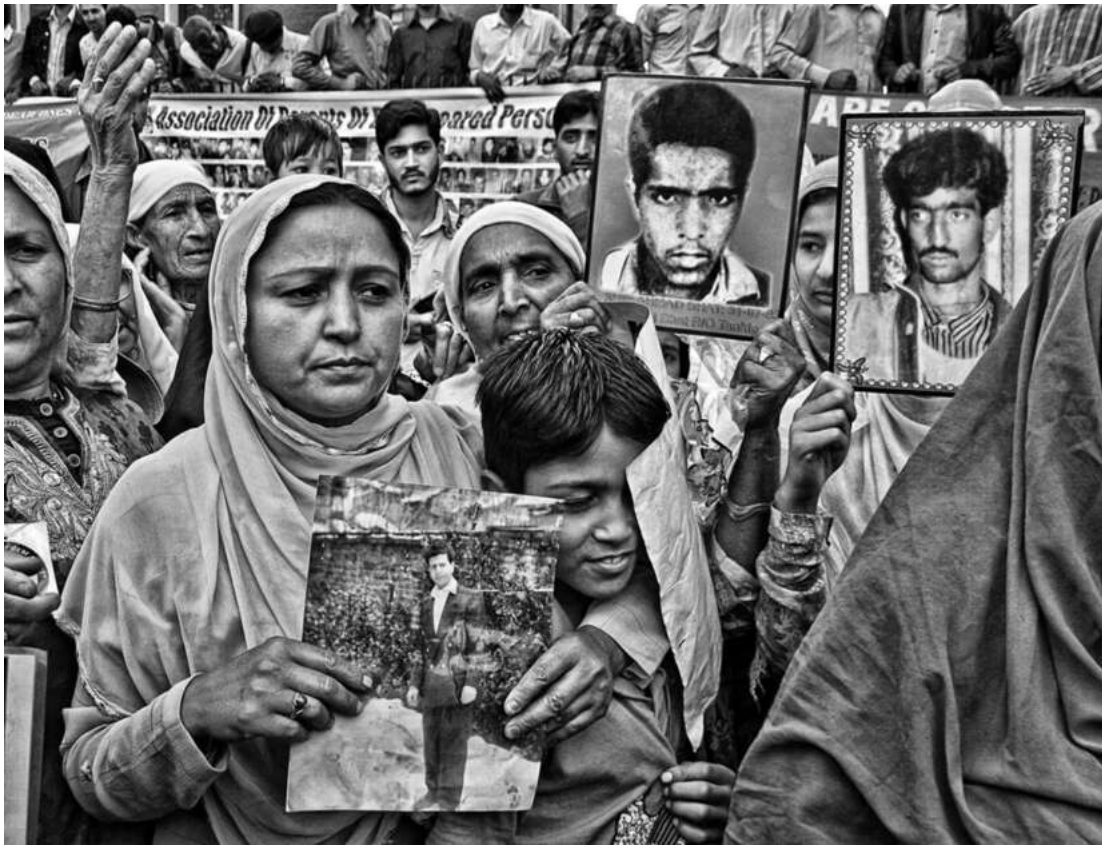
In recent years many people in Kashmir have been refused clearance, citing links with the resistance. Aala had also received a job offer from Dubai, but since he had been denied a passport, he could not travel. A security index in Kashmir has blacklisted about seventy-five thousand families, and about four hundred thousand youths stand impeded in securing employment, which requires travel documents, background checks, and police verification. Even though the government maintains that such people or their families have active or past links with the armed resistance, in most cases such links are nonexistent (Gilani 2014). Many youths are being denied opportunities for mainstream employment. This

phenomenon is exacerbated by the constantly hounding counterinsurgency grid, which makes the youths desperate. They become easy prey for the government to absorb into the irregular militia or even the regular police, which advertises more jobs than any other department in Kashmir. Militarized at an advanced pace, the local Kashmir police have become one of the largest government departments in Kashmir, having swollen from a mere eighteen thousand to more than one hundred thousand (“Despite Anti-India Protests” 2016; Ganai 2009). At the forefront of counterinsurgency, the Kashmir police have also adopted a goodwill policy called the Civic Action Programme (CAP) to draw youth away from Tehreeki ideology.

THE DEEPENING GRAY

There is growing evidence that in recent years tensions between politicians, the civil administration, and the military have been increasing. There are reports of confrontations with the army’s overimplementation of AFSPA and general high-handedness in their dealings with the civil administration. It must be kept in mind that there are two serving military corps commanders who act as the security advisers to the chief minister; therefore the Indian army is indispensable to administering Kashmir. The military is enmeshed in the governance of frontier communities and has made a strong foray in engaging in the main cities and towns of the Kashmir Valley.

Over the past two decades the troops have continued to increase (Navlakha 2007). The Goodwill projects are implemented to make inroads into all aspects of social, economic, and cultural life. Yet the operation has in no way changed the manner of the Indian army; rather, it remains “an attempt to make the military appear democratic and shed its colonial persona” (Bhan 2013: 134). For people like Raheem they have to “kill the snake and not break the stick.” It is through that process that the army and administration coerce people into regulated behaviors to thwart the desire for self-determination; however, the trace of aspirations for Kashmir’s sovereignty and resistance are retained in the palimpsest of Kashmiri subjectivity.



KASHMIR ONLY BLEEDS

in the district, near what they insist is a border
the dust is still uneasy on the graves,
now only numbered

dead-men's shirts
hang from the nearby trees
untired flags touched by kids
too young to know poetry

the gash across the verdant body
now even deeper,
the glass map of our country, broken still

i swear Shahid, i picked up where you left
in this long war of learning
our Kashmir only bleeds—

Note: Shahid means “witness” and also alludes to the poet Agha Shahid Ali.

CHAPTER 6

ARCHIVING AND EMBODYING THE DISAPPEARED

Hableh sat in the middle of a sun-filled courtyard. Her rheumy eyes with translucent pupils gazed at the turnips she was cleaning for dinner. She was humming mechanically. Hableh's family told me that she had always been good at stringing together small wedding ditties and other ceremonial songs. All her life, Hableh had been sought after for wedding soirees as well as funerals, where such lyrical skill was required to mark and heighten the occasion. Her stringing together of verses or, in more formal wording, oral poetry has become her solace since the disappearance of her pharmacist son, Rafiq, almost a decade ago. Now she spends her days versifying her loss and pain while doing household chores.

I am bearing the pain of my heart burnt to cinders,
I am calling you day in and day out.

Hableh sang as I sat in front of her listening, humbled by her grief. Her verses were more potent, more lyrical in Kashmiri than the translation suggests. She spoke in a very poetic way. "My son left for the city one morning," she told me. "Instead of tea, I fed him rice, thinking he should have a substantial meal, thinking the journey is long. And the journey has been long; he said while leaving, 'Mother: I am off to get the medicines [consignment].'" Hableh stopped the story at this point, and added: "Since then, I have been ailing; my medicine is still in arrival; my heart has pus; I am left untreated."¹ She pulled at her *pheran*, exposing a little skin, raw

and red, with green crusts that suggested an infection underneath. Clawing over the scabs, she drew blood. Earlier, her husband had told me that ever since her son disappeared, she falls into episodes of weeping and beating her chest and face. Throughout the day, uncaring of whether people are around, Hableh strings together heartbreaking songs while sitting in the courtyard. When I offered to arrange someone who would write down her songs, she said: “I lost the most beautiful song of them all [her son], who was written by God himself. I would disappear every word I utter, if only he were to appear.” In this moment, to me Hableh uncannily echoed the sentiments of the loss of Habbeh Khotoon.

During our conversation Hableh brought out Rafiq’s album. Flipping through the pages, she showed me the trip he had made to the famed Gulmarg ski resort two years before he was disappeared. When her grandson, who was playing nearby, came to sit on her lap, Hableh remarked that the little boy had taken after his uncle Rafiq in mannerisms. It seemed for her that Rafiq, even though he was disappeared, was a more vital presence than everyone else surrounding her. She conjured him in everything her eyes fell upon: the place, the child, and even inversely in the turnips she was dicing: “He simply hated the smell of turnips. Were he home today, you would not find me cooking them,” she said.

Hableh showed me the papers pertaining to Rafiq’s disappearance. The ubiquitous plastic bag full of documents sat beside her. She expected me to go through the papers—see, read, ask questions—while she cried and held each paper as if it were the ultimate proof of Rafiq’s existence and his eventual enforced disappearance. She handed me each one and I read them, finding the same unhelpful and obfuscating official vocabulary from the police and bureaucrats that I had seen in other such documents. Like the kin of the other disappeared, Hableh and her husband had collected office memos, inane flyers, and circulars from government offices pertaining to the issue of disappearances, which were of little consequence to her case. Hableh expectantly pushed the papers toward me. She elegantly strung together gut-wrenching words: “My Rafiq is lost; now this [documents] is my *rafiq* [friend], but it brings no *rafaqat* [succor].” Hableh called the file

“Rafiq,” which is not only her son’s name but means “friend”; she emphasized that the documents provide no *rafaqat* (succor derived from *rafîq*). While her tragedy is immense, her power of expression amplified it.

It is a matter of common and tragic notice that most APDP activists carry bags bursting at the seams with documents pertaining to disappearances. They refer to the documents in the bag as a “file,” adopting the bureaucratic word for a collection of documents pertaining to a specific case.² Sometimes the documents are referred to as *kakad* (“papers” in Kashmiri). The activists and kin of the disappeared persons use these words interchangeably. At first the bag does not seem to be significant, except for its ubiquity, since almost all the APDP activists carry such bags during the protests, for, as they say, it “might be needed.” Once one gets to know the activists and the families, this bag of documents takes on a heightened presence. The documents are often preserved in polythene bags, or many prefer sturdy jute totes to hold the increasing pile of papers. Most bags that I handled were worn out and distended by the sheer volume of *kakad* / *kagzaat* (documents/ paperwork) collected over the years. The motif of the bag that contains the file encapsulates a routine that makes the disappeared “present” and is also a physical presence on the women’s bodies when they carry the bag around.

How is countermemory produced, and how does it undergird the nature of these women’s everyday lives? What is the affect countermemory infuses into their activism? The women create a counter to what the government is either documenting or purging and disseminating against the people who have been disappeared. In some cases the denial on the part of the government forces is so severe that the kin is accused of alleging disappearance of a person who probably did not even exist. In such cases not only is the physical body gone but even memory is threatened. In the 1990s, for example, a boy named Suhail, who was one of six sons, disappeared in the army’s custody. The army alleged that his mother, Gul Bano, was wrongly accusing them. Such was the cavalier attitude shown to a mother’s tragedy that sometimes the army would undermine her

complaint by saying that she had only five sons.³ While alleging that Suhail did not even exist, they would sometimes also claim that he had run away from home to become a militant and that Bano was trying to frame the army to extract compensation. One army officer with utter disregard for Bano's predicament even told her that the disappearance of one child hardly should matter to her because she still had five other sons. The misgivings caused by the army around Suhail's existence trace how torturous the paths to finding the disappeared are, how arduous it is to claim that the disappeared even existed, and how routine the suffering has become.

The existence of the disappeared is thus threatened at all levels, with no precedent for what closure can be like. Most kin might differ in how they pursue looking for the disappeared—whether they join the APDP, pursue only court cases, take the matter to government authorities, all of the above, or even suffer in silence. One thing is common among most families: gathering paperwork. In the manner of Hableh, Parveena, or Zooneh, Bano also put a mass of documents that she had collected in front me. She wanted me to see everything that bore Suhail's name. She wanted to show that he had been a real, living person. I saw photographs and the documents she had procured for the court case. She seemed to be in an outright battle with the military occupation; it was less about getting justice, which she saw as almost impossible, but more to affirm the memory of her son and the realness of his existence. It is in these affective crevices that memory stays and the flag of resistance against the erasure that the militarized government enforces flies high. These become modes of countermemory and ways of remembering that emerge and that must be acknowledged as acts of resistance and agency as good as any other institutional modes. Even if they are not generative of tangible forms of justice, they certainly are intent upon it.

THE SPECTER OF THE FILE

During my fieldwork the file became an ethnographic presence. I began to notice these files against the stark backdrop of the bodies holding them, and

the incorporation of the file into their stories of enforced disappearance. When I first met Hameeda, whose son Ansur had disappeared in custody thirteen years earlier, she, like all the women I had met until then, put before me the contents of what she referred to as “Ansur-en file” (Ansur’s file). Whenever I asked her a question about Ansur or his disappearance, she rummaged for a paper or gestured toward the bag, as if to reinforce the veracity of her experience. This moment with Hameeda was not unique. It happened with striking coincidence with other kin-activists as well, where the file was produced as a form of truth. Culled from the documents of the government’s own institutions, it seemed to be a supplement to the women’s experience. The file became an artifact laden with affect, even if the documents themselves did not establish the disappearance in strict legal terms.

The collection of documents amassed by the activists—that is, the file—appears as a central motif of countermemory, of loss, and of a subaltern power. I understand this file as an archive that the women activists collect and curate as a site of preservation and propagation of a traumatic history. Contrary to what we might expect of an archive, it is not housed in a building of great architectural worth connected to the state. This archive is not housed in a stately building and safe vaults but is found in nondescript tote bags hanging from the ceiling or kept in tin trunks. But this archive is always in a safe place. I use the term “archive” to elucidate the centrality of the documents. They do not fit what one imagines an archive to be, but then, as Jacques Derrida (1996: 90) has written: “Nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive.’” I stretch the term “archive” to illustrate how the file that is gathered document by document is curated and how it becomes a physical and affective site where the disappeared becomes “present” and the disappearance is established.

In 2012 the human rights organization Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) published *Alleged Perpetrators* (Imroz et al. 2012). This report was prepared by using information gleaned mostly from official documents that provide a list of 214 cases, which identified 500 individual perpetrators, including army personnel, paramilitary personnel, local police

personnel, and government-backed militia (*ikhwanees*). The introduction claims the following:

This report, by and large, allows official documents to speak for themselves. The intention behind this choice was not to in any way undermine the validity or significance of oral testimonies in speaking truth to power, but was seen as a way of confronting the State with facts that it itself would consider valid and beyond reproof. If official documents, produced by the State's own functionaries and institutions tell the "Official Truth," the documents in this report repeatedly and conclusively certify the impossibility of justice in Jammu and Kashmir. The documents are of different types: FIRs [first information reports], statements before police and/or magistrates, police final reports [closure reports or charge sheets], High Court petitions, objections, other documents forming a part of the court record such as compliance reports, status report, judicial enquiries, SHRC [State Human Rights Commission] documents from complaints to objections, police submissions and final orders. (Imroz et al. 2012: 16)

The report claims that it is not undermining but supplementing the oral testimonies through documents culled from the government's own institutions. The kin of the disappeared are also doing something similar. They gather and curate these documents as the "Official Truth."

However, the file gathered by the kin, unlike the *Alleged Perpetrators* report, can comprise all kinds of documents in addition to legal, bureaucratic, or police paperwork, if available. More often than not, the files contain *parchis* (short notes, pieces of paper) procured from a sympathetic civil servant, a random politician, or an army or police official, to aid in the search. Most of the time these *parchis* are useless referrals to other officers in the government. Rather than help, this chain of referrals is a phenomenon in itself that rarely yields results for the search. Even when the paperwork becomes an endless chore, which rarely contributes to the progress of the search, the kin still make sure they gather all documentary bits. Almost every family will possess exact replicas of the files as they exist in courts or other government offices (if they exist at all), or at least versions that are close enough. They procure copies of documents, which are perceived as useful, sometimes after pleading with clerks, paying bribes, or invoking pity.

Apart from the official documents directly or indirectly pertaining to the disappearance, the files contain paperwork concerning the life of the disappeared, such as a birth certificate, proof of residence, employment confirmations, even school report cards and diplomas. Even though these documents do not help the case, they are present for the specific purpose of building the life narrative of the disappeared. Most of the activists, when asked, will take considerable time to display and explain the contents of the file—or what I call the “performing of the file.” This performative aspect includes explaining each document at length, interspersed with retelling anecdotes from the life of the disappeared, often from birth up until the event of the disappearance. The file seems to stand in for the disappeared and assign a space, offering visibility to what was made invisible. Zooneh, like other activists, always carried the file to various offices in an old jute bag, cradling it like she would a baby. Many times, when I offered to carry it for her, she would decline, holding it closer.

In effect, the possession of these papers is the only notable thing about them. The documents have an affective value; otherwise, there is very little that they contribute to the progression of the legal cases. The file becomes a “utopian space of comprehensive knowledge not a building nor even a collection of texts, but the collectively imagined junction of all that was known or knowable” (Richards 1993: 11). The activists will frequently bolster an argument using the phrase, “It is all written in the file; the document talks.” These instances embody the file as a touchstone—a repository signifying the “presence” of the disappeared, credible because it is “written.” The activists will often say “the file does not die” or, similarly, “the document does not die.” This signifies the invincibility and credibility of this mobile archive that is seen as important for establishing the disappearance and the retrieval of the disappeared.

Amid the matrix of enforced disappearances in Kashmir, where the government powers focus on erasure, memory manifests in many surreptitious ways. Sometimes even the very act of forgetting becomes foundational to memory making (see chapter 7 for a discussion). The acts of remembrance may not always be overtly confrontational to the government,

and the activists constantly cull the government's own dense matrix—be it the courts, police, and bureaucracy—for shards of evidence, a document here, or a *parchi* there. In this context the file as an embodiment of countermemory to the government's imposition of erasure of the disappearance becomes pivotal in shaping the resistance against oppression. It also reveals the paradox of government functioning in Kashmir: it is only institutions or agents of the government who can “authorize” the pieces of paper into any form of memorial or other value. So here we find the government at odds with itself, even if in the long run it does not help the cases. The documentation collected by the activists and kin becomes a part of a repertoire that constitutes the politics of mourning and becomes a performative site, sometimes as an extension of the bodies of the women, and vice versa. Chapter 7 explores how memory becomes embodied and engages in an “act of transfers” (Taylor 1997).

In 2000 the APDP tried to build a memorial for the disappeared persons at Lawaypur, a suburb of Srinagar. After the function ended, the police descended on the scene and resorted to gunfire. They also dismantled the foundation stone. Today the memorial stands abandoned, with weeds overgrowing the brick-and-mortar slab that would have carried the names of the disappeared. The memorial was rebuilt several times, only to have the government forces dismantle it. The APDP activists have lost count of the number of scuffles with the police to let it stand, which has not been for more than an hour or so. “We have no *yaadgaar* [memorial], no grave site,” Parveena said. “We could go to this memorial to commemorate, to cry, to sit. It would be the grave of our children, our memory of them, but it is not to be.”⁴

There are historical examples of the severe repercussions of resistance against government violence, which can result in death, exile, or incarceration. The case of human rights lawyer Jalil Andrabi, who was killed in the 1990s, has become symbolic of civilian resistance. Andrabi, a prominent defender of human rights, was arrested and disappeared until his body was found nineteen days later, trussed up, floating in the River Jehlum (Human Rights Watch 1999). In September 1998 unidentified gunmen shot

dead Haleema Begum, the founding member of the APDP, along with her son. Amnesty International (1999) has concluded that “many local observers link the killing to the persistence with which Haleema Begum sought to trace her son.” She had been frantically organizing the search for her son, who had been subjected to enforced disappearance.

In the context of such silencing, how is memory produced? How does it stay, create, and inform? During a time of unspeakable violence, it seems like the space for memory is constricted—which does not mean forgetting or that no one remembers. While the government is in the process of thwarting memory through repressive erasure, we see countermemory materializing. The ethnographic terrain traces how memorializing acts are codified and curated, and hence archived. The manner in which the disappeared are woven into life by the living is an act of patient rage. These modes of memory have become routine for the community of activists, for the loss is never forgotten. The archival resistance produces subjugated knowledge, which George Lipsitz (1990: 213) has explained as “a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal. Unlike historical narratives that begin with the totality of human existence and then locate specific actions and events within that totality, counter-memory starts with the particular and the specific and then builds outward toward a total story. Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives . . . counter-memory focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience.”

THE NEXT DATE

Zooneh often pondered on the irony of her husband being a watchman for the big businesses in the historic Lal Chowk plaza. She juxtaposed her husband’s job of guarding people’s property and possessions with losing “her real wealth—her son” and finding no trace of him. “How do I remember my *yaar* [friend-confidant-lover]?” she wailed. “I have no grave,

no jail; he is here, everywhere, yet nowhere. How do I tell he existed? Now all he is, is here.” Lamenting, she pointed to her chest to signify that Syed Ahmed is a memory embodied within her body. “We were left with nothing—no body, no paper—no complaint was allowed. Sitting at the doors of law, I was thrown out.” She mentioned the unproductive spaces of “law”—the doors of police stations, offices, courts, or army camps. The law exists but only to penalize; as a mode of justice, it has itself become a specter, an invisibility, like the disappeared.

Zooneh’s case has been languishing in the court and the SHRC. She has submitted petitions to almost every relevant office in the administration and to politicians who might be remotely amenable to helping her. In one notable instance, she tried to get an audience with a politician twenty times in the span of three years. “Beess [twenty],” she said thrusting her two hands, palms outward, twice at me. “I would be sitting at the door,” she said. “The door was always shut to me. You know those big doors, made of solid wood, they don’t budge . . . they always asked me to come again.” Like Kafka’s countryman, who is given a stool by the gatekeeper to sit on, Zooneh was asked to keep waiting. One day, which would prove to be her last visit, she tried to push her way inside the door after she caught sight of the politician, only to be told that he had left the premises. She ended up getting a *parchi* recommending her case from one of the politician’s staff members. Zooneh took the note to an army officer, who crumpled it and threw it back at her, saying that “such *sifarish* [recommendation/good word]” was of no use to him.

On examining this *parchi*, which Zooneh has preserved in her file, it appeared to be just a regular piece of paper with no proprietary letterhead. It bore a generic request for help that stated: “The bearer is a poor, destitute mother looking for her son, Syed Ahmed. Please help as seen fit.” The size and flourish of the signature seemed to have been deemed sufficient to establish the eminence of its author and its influence on the reader, but no proprietary clues were visible. The note embodied a deferral in the form of a referral. It was similar to Zooneh’s experience in the court of law, where all she got was the *tareekh*—the date for the next hearing. The referral also

becomes spectral a priori, neither present nor absent “in the flesh,” neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another.

About her court case, Zooneh said, “Only *tareekh* arrives, nothing else.” Continuous deferral was part of her life. Despite knowing that the hearing for her case often gets postponed, she assiduously attends the court. Her relation with the law was one of “infinite deferral,” the suspended expectation of “not now,” just like Kafka’s protagonist. Like in Kafka’s parable, the path to the door is not blocked—in fact, the door is even slightly ajar, and the gatekeeper also invites the countryman to take a peek—but ultimately there is no entry into the law. As far as the government is concerned, giving Zooneh a new *tareekh* is a trespass prevention tactic that not only ensures her obedience to the law and her expectation from it but also her return. Zooneh is left waiting indefinitely *before* the law. The unconsummated relationship thus becomes what Jacques Derrida (1994), while analyzing the nature of law, has called the “not now” or “not yet,” where the ever-deferred state of law in itself becomes an emptiness, an invisibility, and an absence, like “the present-absent” specter.

The paradox is that Zooneh has little else to fall back on, but to turn to the very law that has enabled the conditions for disappearing her son. She has no recourse but to knock on the doors of courts and offices. While she resists, the paradox of law, as Yael Navaro-Yashin (2013) has reminded us, is that it unwittingly enlists the subject. This is not Zooneh’s flaw but is the absurdity of the law; it is the fictional foundation of the law, which Derrida (1994) has called law “fiction,” specifically “law of fiction, and the fiction of law.” The perpetrators who have effected the disappearance have the law on their side. India has formally declared Kashmir as a Disturbed Area, and in such a territory not only the combatant but every Kashmiri, including Zooneh, is a potential “suspect” and thus a killable body for which no account will be taken by the government.

Yet Zooneh crafts something very unique from the abjectness of the law, especially through the deferral of hearings on her case. She collects all the documents that are issued in connection to the “next date” and any other notifications and cause-lists that come her way. Officially these documents

carry no weight, but for Zooneh they become a part of Syed Ahmed's archival retrieval. Besides these papers, Zooneh collects every document she thinks is connected to the case—copies of applications she has filed, assorted official documents, circulars, notifications, memos, media reports, and other publications pertaining to disappearances. She adds them all to "Syed Ayub's file."

Despite the nonexistence of documents like the FIR, which would establish Syed Ahmed's disappearance *in front of* the law, Zooneh's file stands in as a mark of the disappearance. It becomes a sign, a countermemory. Although these infinite deferrals and official notifications give no relief to Zooneh, she gleans from these visits bits of documents, which may have little formal weight. "These [documents] are a witness in my case against the government of Hindustan," she stated firmly. "Each time the court gives me a new *tareekh*, it admits each time that I am accusing them of disappearing my son." In this liminal space before the law, Zooneh ensures that she fills the archival gap and creates the file as a unique archival embodiment, despite the physical irretrievability of her son. This process becomes a manifestation of the affective law.

The file, as Matthew Hull (2012: 127) has explained in the context of South Asian bureaucracies, is as "technology for materially enacting an authoritative decision, for making decisions out of various utterances and action." Likewise, for the kin the file becomes a way to materially enact the disappeared. Zooneh and many of her colleagues have made carefully procured copies of the *kakad/kagzaat* (paperwork/documents) that exist as part of their files in the police stations, courts, the SHRC, and other government offices, which they might have approached for redress. Most of the cases are "missing" the FIR, which is the most important document. However, this document is not missing because the copies could not be procured but because it was never admitted or written in the first place. Only a few FIRs, particularly from the 1990s, exist for disappearances; in most cases no criminal or civil complaint was accepted by the authorities (Mathur 2016). Instead of the FIR, in recent years, petitions submitted by the families to the SHRC or the court have been used as "implied

complaints,” treated as the basis of many “untraced,” never-pursued investigations. Again, these have borne no results.

“They [government/police/army] can kill me,” Zooneh said, “but my file will not die.” The “not dying” attribute of the file is a refrain I heard often. The perceived life of the document animates the disappeared in their absence. Zooneh reflected the sentiments of many other APDP activists when she asked, “Who will listen to me? Who will believe me? Documents talk; they have a weight.” Among the families of the disappeared, opening a file formally in an office (a process commonly called *file kholen* or *khulawen*) is seen as an important step in initiating the search for the disappeared. Even though the official and judicial procedures are disappointing, the activists compel all new members to “urgently open a file.” The initiation of the file in an administrative office, court, or the SHRC becomes almost like a conception or seeding, only after which the case can gestate.

The term “document” has become “a verb” (Megill 1997: 25); “to document” is an important activity even if, in the case of disappearances, it is immediately unproductive. The growth of the file can be positive if there is an addition of useful documents directed toward the search for the disappeared person, which is a rarity. The most obvious growth in these files is negative, through the ways in which the government authorities suppress facts by purging documents that could be helpful to move the case forward. But the might of a document written under the aegis of the government or any legal institution continues to be seen as important, giving credence to the file as an archive, a testament, even if unproductive.

ARCHIVAL FEVER

The absence of the FIR is an analytic for understanding how the file is a site of affect and the politics of mourning. Take Hameeda’s example: when I ask about why the FIR was missing from Ansur’s file, she performed its absence discursively. She took me into the innards of her painful journey to procure the FIR; her vivid recollections brought to life how the police never

admitted it. “They [police/army] would shut the doors on me,” she told me. “I would sit for hours waiting. I tried for many years; they ignored my request. They would trick me; ‘he [Ansur] must have run away,’ they would tell me. Finally, my complaint was never recorded.” Instead of the FIR being a tangible paper entity that I could hold in my hand, where it existed, Hameeda performed the “complaint” before me, albeit inversely. In a similar manner, each time they answered a question about the nonexistence of an FIR, most of the APDP activists performed its absence. Thus the activists, through performative narrations, *themselves* embody the FIR’s absence from their archive. In this way the file becomes part of the repertoire that has been uniquely fashioned to trace the disappeared through an imaginative reconstitution.

Once I overheard a new member-activist complaining that her FIR had not been accepted at the police station, but she had been successful in submitting an application to the SHRC. A senior activist she was talking to asked her: “File *khol-heya* ? [Did they (the officials) start (open) your file?]” When the new member answered in the affirmative, the elder activist exclaimed: “An important step has been taken care of.” She added: “Make sure you get copies [of documents] for yourself.” This assurance from one activist to another came from the widespread belief that once a file begins in any of the government departments, it becomes an irrefutable and in many ways indestructible presence—“it does not die.” Conversely, “*Su file karekh ghaeb* [they (the state) disappeared the file]” is another example of a common disappearance that animates the archival impulse of the activists. There are cases where government authorities have depleted files by pilfering and destroying crucial documents in their official versions. Hence the activists ensure that they have copies.

The activists are reminiscent of archival artists, whom Hal Foster (2004) has defined as those who collect scraps of information relating to an incident, gathering narratives, retracing to trace the “the absence,” and seeking to make disappeared historical information physically present. The disappeared, in their erasure, are continually dying, but the archive and the assembly of documents also become a haunting—a phantom—that is

continually present. This attitude toward collecting an archive of this nature is a subaltern way of seizing agency. In the hands of the kin, the file gains different life, where it is not only *read* but *performed*, thus becoming a means of exegesis of the disappeared person's life and disappearance by government forces. "This is Syed's certificate from the cricket team. He played well; sometimes he got so badly hurt that I would have to massage his back for days," Zooneh said to me as she thumbed through the file, recollecting memories of Syed, her body animated. Since she cannot read, she identifies each document by a seal, signature, or symbol. She shook her head, gestured toward the file, and said: "There is no FIR; they never admitted my complaint."

Like Hameeda, Zooneh heightened the absence of the FIR by retelling how she had been unable to file one. Thus she was enacting the contents of the file—both those that were present and those that were absent. Each enactment focuses on reinforcing the *being* of the disappeared and challenging the government's negation of the very event of the disappearance. The performing of the file conjures a vivid picture of the disappeared person—of his life and the disappearance. This allows the file to essentially become a "stand-in" for the disappeared, an artifact of memory, assignation of space, a countermemory offering visibility to what was made invisible. The performing of the file becomes an everyday repertoire buttressing the archival inscription that fills in for the absence of the disappeared.⁵ Even when the legal and official processes mean nothing but deferral, the file in the hands of the kin becomes a trace, a sign. In the face of documentary annihilation, the mere possession of these documents seems to substantiate, for Zooneh and other families, that the disappearance occurred and by implication that the person did in fact exist, even if the papers say nothing to that effect and make liberal use of the word "alleged" for explaining the nature of the complaint.

THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

While the government's laws make the disappearance possible and thwart investigations, there is also a lack of precedent for how to socially register and commemorate the disappearance of a person. There is every possibility that the disappeared might be alive and, paradoxically, dead. Between these two extremes, the kin do not have any form of acknowledging the event of the disappearance or the disappeared. As Mary Douglas (1966: 80) has underscored: "There are some things we cannot experience without ritual." Disappearance as one such life event, although tragic, cannot be accepted until the kin find the body and socially acknowledge its end in some manner; until then, there is no closure. So how do commemoration and memorialization occur in such cases? In the case of a person who is killed in custody or combat, even if the killing goes unjustified, the family receives the body and attains a social, if not emotional, closure. The rituals of a funeral and other symbolic activities around bereavement assuage the family that a life has now ceased.

Muslims in Kashmir mostly follow Islamic as well as cultural funeral rites. Funerary rites and timelines for mourning might differ in various sects ranging from three to forty days. This period includes observing rituals around worship, food, and confinement. The family organizes funerary rites that include collective lamentation by women and separate prayer meetings for men. The lamentation is entirely a feminine forte, which includes a well-established repertoire of gestures, and elegies. The family might visit saints, faith healers, and shrines with offerings to pray for peace for the departed and the emotional healing of the surviving. Such funerary engagements are universally known to serve the purpose of laying the dead to rest and easing the grief of those bereaved.

The Kashmiri combatants and noncombatants killed by the government forces are treated as martyrs. Common slogans chanted during such funerals include, "A martyr's death is the life of a nation" and "A martyr never dies." The religious edicts attached to the category of martyrdom, which I term "survivalisms," become honorific. These survivalisms include promises of eternal life and heaven to the martyred, and an honored social status to the bereaved family—especially the parents. Thus the survivalisms

that emerge from the exalted posthumous life of the martyr ensure a sacred closure for the family. However, no such survivalisms come with the category of those forcibly disappeared. There are no recognized social practices of commemorating the person who could, for all practical purposes, turn up alive.

The agony of disappearance seems unlike any other. It is multiplied, manifold; it is full of hauntings, moments of treating the person alive and dead at other times, sometimes both simultaneously. In the case of a killing, the body is received in whatever state—full, half, torso only, head only, limbs chopped off, viscera missing, eyes gouged out—and is interred. The family is able to establish a spatial connection not only to the mortal remains but also to the symbolic site of annihilation—namely, the gravesite. When the family buries the body, it is consigned to the disappearance of the expected kind from the material world forever. Through the funeral rituals, a killed body attains a closure that is accepted and expected, and thus organic. The family has a sense of control over the outcome of the life form, if not the life itself.

The disappeared, however, exists as a perpetually living specter that lurks by the door in that knock that is always about to come. There is no closure. The disappeared is always within reach in the entrails of the carceral system—a flip of a page away in jail rosters. The hope of the family hovers between thoughts such as if they could only find that powerful person in the government, army, or police or search with more rigor to confirm if their loved one is being detained in some jail. Every shadow that trembles in the snow or sun seems like the disappeared, always outside the window, cold, hungry, and wounded or hot, thirsty, and bloody, always waiting to come in. Since the disappeared is nowhere, he is everywhere, a strange presence inciting to action and acts of memory. The disappearance might have occurred in the past, but the disappeared is always present.

THE UNDYING FILE AND THE TALKING DOCUMENT

Hameeda kept Ansur's file pegged to the wall. When she offered it to me, she said: "Wareh waar waal, sambhalith [Bring it down slowly, with care]." She was directing me as if I was handling a newborn or a piece of porcelain. The document bag, distended and worn out, was marked Very Nice Kashmir Stores—probably the name of a fabric store. Hameeda wanted me to look for copies of documents she needed for her upcoming hearing at the SHRC. We spread out the contents of the bag and began sifting. Somewhat like in a library, the silence hung like an extra layer adding to the darkness in the room. Hameeda often said that "documents talk" and that "they hold power which our [women's] voices lack," emphasizing how much trust is reposed in the written word, even if it is ineffective. The file involves no particular method for collecting the documents. The process is arbitrary at best, but as a material entity it plays an important role in challenging the silence that surrounds those forcibly disappeared. It becomes a site of memorialization through a bureaucratic assembly of papers, which is constricted by a circulatory dialogic network filled with stamps, notes, memos, and other paraphernalia of the government, and which often formally yields nothing of substance. Even then, in its sterile presence within the government apparatus, the file becomes a graphic embodiment of the disappeared.

While the file becomes an embodiment of the disappeared and a crucial part of the discursive repertoire of the activists, most documents do not bear evidence of whether the disappearance was enforced or if it even occurred. From what I have seen on most applications and memos, the government officers have used the word "alleged" liberally to explain the nature of the complaint by the kin. Even as the file becomes a form of intimate memory in the hands of kin, its operational life in the bureaucracy and judiciary remains dismal. It gathers more notes and initials from officers, going up and down the bureaucratic entrails. Deferred perusals and disheartened delegations are the hallmark of actions done on the files. Each file displays arrays of muted orders written in passive language, where the officers do not identify themselves but project their authority to absolve any proprietorship. The file, which is a potent symbol (even if ineffective in the

long run) of that “which does not die,” according to the activists, for the likes of Zooneh also becomes a haunting, albeit of a different kind, lurking in the labyrinthine entrails of the bureaucracy.

A file, according to Mathew Hull (2012: 129), is a “time bomb” for bureaucrats. It can go off anytime. Especially in the politically volatile scenario of Kashmir, if the officers diverge from generic memoing and write something proprietary, it might come back to haunt them. Thus the file becomes a haunting in the government archives, where it stays dormant, awaiting operations that are deferred endlessly. However, as an important symbol of the politics of mourning, the file allows the activists a physical and psychic contestation against the crippling nature of power. It manifests that subjugated knowledge is relational to power, not in a position of exteriority, as Michel Foucault would say. Contesting power in this manner indicates a spectral “jumping out” of the web of power, of individuality and agency, before the eventual deference to power occurs, which in this instance means that the cases yield no results. Zooneh’s resistance and that of her counterparts is not solely a negation of hegemony but a search for a technique, a form of power, through the daily symbolics of countermemory, which may or may not change the hegemonic order of the military occupation. These acts are often based on a complex subaltern ideology expressed in private transcripts, which are usually mostly hidden from the dominant group (Bhabha 1984; Scott 1985). These modes of countermemory often remain invisible to mainstream perspectives and have a precarious subterranean existence.

THE AFFECTIVE ARCHIVE

As I sat in the sun-dappled room in Hameeda’s small home, listening to the story of her son’s disappearance, I was struck by how uncannily it resembled the hundreds I had heard before.⁶ Only the words, faces, and settings changed; everything else—the tears, the pain, and loss—remained the same. Every time I heard a mother or wife talk about the pain of

disappearance, the heinousness of the crime heightened while also becoming a routine. Hameeda said the following about Ansur:

What can you do? What can the empty assurances of high officers do for me? These words are meaningless; I have been tricked. It is like that trick-ster in the circus who vanished my son before my eyes, and now I am told that I cannot even look; I even have to prove that he existed. How does one deal with that kind of doubt? My son has been made to vanish into thin air. Now, all he is, is here: this file has everything that Ansur ever did, and this is what remains of him in the offices that are bent on making sure he disappears again. And one day, this: [She points to the bag of documents] this will bring them to account. [She puts her hand tenderly on the bag.] But, you know what, even these documents, they want to disappear them too, but that won't happen. God willing, we will make them come to their knees. I have hope; it's been ten years, but I feel it in my heart that he is on his way home.

After sifting through Ansur's file and retrieving a paper Hameeda wanted, I neatly put the papers back in no particular order. She asked: "Did you put all [the papers] back?" She took the bag and carefully peered inside, as if to confirm that I had returned everything, even though she cannot read or write. She had collected the documents from the court, government, police, army, media, and human rights organizations—anything relating to enforced disappearance. Once I talked about a new report on human rights in Kashmir, and Hameeda asked for a *kaepee* (a colloquial word for "a copy"), for it "might be of use some day."

The file always occupies the safest place in the room, away from easy reach; sometimes it is jammed between the planks in the ceiling, hidden from everyone, or it is on the highest shelf in the cupboard and even in a metal box. I remember an activist who kept her file behind the bolster against which she usually sat. She was as careful about the bag as any mother would be about a vulnerable child or a curator about an ancient glass artifact. Zooneh carried the file close to her body, cradling it like she would a baby. Parveena Ahangar had a cupboard full of "her files," which I often studied under her supervision. She never lent me her files for perusal but was generous about allowing me to take pictures or photocopies, which she ensured would be done through her. She said: "I have collected every word about the disappearance of my son and about the other disappeared."

Parveena has extra files comprising documents based on her work: the awards, testimonies, media articles, photographs, certificates, and multimedia articles that she has received for her work as a human rights defender. “See this,” she said, “the world knows that my son was disappeared. This is not just the proof of his kidnapping but of all other men that I struggle for.” She displayed the ID card that she had received at a human rights conference in Dublin, which identified her as an International Human Rights Defender. In the early days of her search for Javed, Parveena said: “They did not have even a *kagaz tilim* [shred of a document]. We made our basic record newspaper reports on the disappeared and legal petitions. I keep all the files in my records. Documents are important; otherwise, everything will disappear. A human being is temporary; we will have nothing to show. A file talks; it does not die.”⁷

The “not dying” of the file is an important metaphor in many ways. It is not only a haunting repository for producing knowledge about the disappeared but it also fills a discursive and spatial lack of the disappeared individual; it is an “affective archive.” In *Archive Fever* (1996), Derrida marks the archive as the space of difference between a natural psychic apparatus, an interior somatic space of memory, and an artificial documentary apparatus—a technological space of deposition, an extrasomatic site.⁸ This affective archive is what an outside archive can be said to contain; it conserves the traces of the disappeared, is a spatiality and a discursive reflexivity, which has otherwise been foreclosed. The archives represent the internal dynamic of psychic life and memory. Thus the affective archive is a shrine, a monument, a memory: resistance to forgetting and a step toward justice. The archive becomes an outside memory, a presence personified, a subversive museum sometimes filled with artifacts that the government itself has endorsed, like memos or decrees or reports, or media write-ups.

THE SPATIAL ARCHIVE

Sakina entered the room carrying two bags: a plastic one containing documents, and a cloth satchel full of mementos and framed pictures. Her son Faysal, just out of school, was disappeared. The bags occupied a place at Sakina's side, where Faysal might have been if he had accompanied his mother or had been a young child, like an appendage on her shoulder. As we talked, Sakina arranged the artifacts in front me. Weeping noiselessly, she seemed adept at arranging the contents of the bag in a neat line, even though her eyes were blurry with tears. She lined photographs against the wall. In one picture Faysal was receiving a prize; in another he was playing cricket; in the last one he looked intently into the camera.

Sakina appeared like the curator of a mobile museum comprising a subversive ensemble of inscriptions and artifacts. This affective archive is a trace: inscriptive, descriptive, and spatial. Faysal occupied nearly a quarter of the small room where we sat. In this act of outside memory, the essential difference between the archive and the repertoire collapses. I use "repertoire" here as Diana Taylor (2003) has explained the term: as behavior that is grounded in social learning. In this case it is the disappearance that entails verbal performances, such as songs, prayers, and speeches, as well as nonverbal practices. For Sakina the memorabilia in her archives become props for transmitting the gaps that the legal documentary absences have left. The choice of these artifacts constructs Faysal as he appeared to his mother and as she wants to preserve him. I am witness to this imaginative reconstitution. By way of absence, Faysal appears in the archive that stands for him.

Sakina talked about the cruel and unjust government that had "illegally" disappeared her son. She told me Faysal was "innocent," an upright boy who was helpful to everyone. Revealing her somewhat paradoxical relationship to the law, Sakina showed me a government-issued document called a character certificate—an endorsement people need when they seek admission to educational institutions or employment. The inscriptions, especially the ones that Sakina perceives as unquestionably authentic, are from the government authorities—school, hospital, police, and administrative offices. Thus the same lawless government that disappeared

Faysal issues the very documents deemed as “lawful.” This paradox is at the heart of governmentality, of any person existing in Kashmir today, where the regime of inhabiting citizenship unfolds through validating and disciplinary processes that one might be working against. While the APDP activists challenge the militarized government, their recourse is forced through documents issued by those very institutions.

THE BODY ARCHIVE

Sakina narrated the story of Faysal’s birth, showing me pictures, his tiny baby clothes, and a doctor’s prescription for his cough. “We both caught a cold, Faysal and me,” she recalled. “The doctor prescribed antibiotics only for me because, he said, Faysal would get it anyway through my milk.” She pointed to Faysal’s weight at birth: 1 kilogram and 1 ounce. She reminisced about the length of her labor and how easily he had slid into the doctor’s hands, like soap. She had felt painless at the moment of his birth; now she feels in perpetual pain, as though she is in labor for his second coming. The way Sakina touched her abdomen, as if indicating the inscriptions that being pregnant with Faysal had left on her body, as though she was presenting her body as evidence: a body archive of Faysal’s disappearance and his existence in this world.

Zooneh’s rendition of Syed Ahmed’s delivery, as she related it to me, was also laden with embodied affect. When Zooneh’s labor began in the evening, she had been alone, because her husband was out on duty as a nightwatchman. She had caught the baby in her hands as he slipped out. Eventually the neighbors heard her cries and rushed to her aid. Zooneh reminisced about how quick Syed Ahmed had been to nurse; she held him in her lap and nursed him continually for seventeen days when he developed a fever. In the retelling, Zooneh clasped the back of her neck. “This. This area,” she said, “it almost went numb, and my neck developed problems,” thus connecting her body’s labor that resulted in constant (and still existing) pain to Syed Ahmed recouping his vitality and health.

Through these events Zooneh invoked Syed Ahmed's body as retained in her own.

In these narratives Zooneh and Sakina appear as primordial mothers. They evoke traces left behind in their bodies as they conjure themselves as the umbilical body. As I sifted through papers in the file, Sakina touched her abdomen as if she was rubbing against a convexity, even though her belly was flat. She called waiting for Faysal "like a pregnancy"—for him to be born again. She made the disappearance an inverse pregnancy, which started with the invisible—a gestation, a waiting, an anticipation of the child's appearance. It had also become an unending pregnancy in which the pain of labor remains ongoing and there is no deliverance. Unlike the moment when Faysal was born, Sakina said that she is in constant pain. The umbilical body is inscribed upon; it is not only a record of her son's birth but also of the disappearance of what emanated from the mother's body, a palimpsest, reminiscent of Freud's mystic writing pad, which records the disappearance and what preceded—that is, the birth. It is also infinitely receptive. When the inscription of the birth is erased, another inscription of disappearance overwrites it, but traces of old inscriptions are left behind. In this manner the psychic system records "the appearance and disappearance of the 'erasure,'" which is similar to "the flickering-up and passing away of consciousness in the process of perception" (Freud 1963 [1925]: 211).

Sakina's body bears a private inscription, similar to Freud explaining the mark of circumcision that constitutes the original archive—a mark exterior to the person but inscribed on the body and therefore always with the person. In the cases of the mothers mentioned in this book, their private archive materializes in the birthing of their child or in their embodying the disappeared in and on their viscera. The discursive embodying takes place in many descriptive ways. Hameeda invokes Ansur as follows: "My *jigar* [liver] has been ripped out with an invisible dagger. I am scarred." She manifests Ansur as a part of her body and his disappearance as etched into her as an absence, a trace, missing viscera. The mother's body becomes an archive that is biologically and physically inscribed upon.

Parveena Ahangar recounts an incident when in haste and lack of paper, a police officer scribbled on the palm of her hand a permit to visit a jail where Parveena suspected her son was being held. This temporary inscription was the only one she would ever have that pointed to her son's detention. This inscription also can be seen as an admission of his future disappearance, which did in fact occur. "Alas! Those days we had no camera phones; I would have taken a picture to record it," said Parveena, who watched the writing fade from her hand as the day progressed and the prison authorities failed to produce her son. Her body in this unique moment became an actual turf of the record of her son's disappearance. "My body was written upon. Even though it [writing] washed off, my heart has the inscription [of Javed's disappearance] written on it forever," she said. Elaine Scarry (1985), in her work on Argentinian disappearances, has called this strategy of verbalization the language of agency, which seeks to make the pain visible (see Gounaridou 2005).

Sadaf, Manzoor's half-widow, often lamented the loss of her *deka* (forehead). In Kashmiri culture, *deka* is used as an honorific metaphor for one's husband. This invocation is not unique to Sadaf but is used by most married women for their husbands. The forehead in most Eastern mystical traditions is seen as the most prominent and spiritually elevated part of the body that reflects wisdom and luck. It also represents the body's highest place of adornment. In Kashmiri tradition a woman's forehead is emblematic of her husband. A woman blessed with a loving and provident husband is referred as *deka-bedd*, meaning "one with the wide forehead." "Forehead" is also invoked as a prayer, such as *gatche tche deke-baedd* (may your forehead be wide) for girls in hopes they will receive a good man in marriage.

Tracing the inscriptions of the disappeared, Tanveera, another half-widow, often observed how closely her identical twin sons resembled her husband. She noted their facial features, their hair, and the moles on their temples, which matched her husband's exactly. Tanveera had only two small, hazy photographs of her husband, who had grown up in an impoverished household in the countryside. He had never had any school

records or other documents in his possession. Tanveera said that she does not regret having so few photographs, however, because her sons were his “living photographs.” According to Tanveera, even her daughter took after her father in her long fingers and mannerisms. Like most of the APDP activists, Tanveera too had not been able to file an FIR—all she had were copies of her court applications. In the absence of any material documents, Tanveera replicates her husband’s existence through her children’s bodies.

The embodiment of the disappeared is fully evident during APDP’s monthly protest, when the activists carry various inscriptions. They wear headbands displaying a faceless man’s profile, symbolic of the disappeared person. They wear long, black robes with photographs of the disappeared hanging from their necks or cradled in their laps, standing in for the disappeared person. The body thus becomes an archive of embodied inscriptions, making the invisible visible. An interesting archival process of note here is the visual documentation of the APDP activists since 1994. These activists have been photographed in every possible manner. As the focus of articles, books, and documentaries, they have become part of the archives, from the realm of material paper to film and virtual forums. A simple Google search using “disappeared in Kashmir” pulls up images and articles on these activists.

The body—be that of mothers, wives, or children—in the context of the disappeared becomes a central act of the archive. In her ethnographic work on the Sikh massacres of 1984 in New Delhi, Veena Das (2007, 2008) has illustrated the complex transaction of body and language through which women provide witness to their destruction and engage in a symbolic language to remember the atrocities through their bodies (Das 2007: 55). In Das’s ethnography Sikh women use bodily language to express their predicament, using phrases such as “drinking all pain” and “digesting the pain.” These metaphors suggest that a woman carries the pain in her body, just like she would a fetus. The intention behind this, however, is to preserve and metabolize the pain and continue living one’s everyday life. Therefore, in this aspect of invisibility, the gendered body is wielded as a

place of holding and mourning, of haunting, and ultimately as a site of agency.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE: A LIVING ARCHIVE

I climbed the pitch-dark stairway to Zareefa's room on the upper floor of a dilapidated building that she rented for a small sum. Considering her income, it was more than she could afford. Zareefa's son, Zahoor, was a victim of enforced disappearance. The challenge in the dark, tottering trek up to her room could rival imaginings of an expedition in search of some ancient and exclusive archives. After finally passing through the debilitating darkness, I entered a low and dingy room. The walls and ceiling were covered with newspaper, which I suspected was to create insulation against the harsh Himalayan winter.⁹ One corner of the room was devoted to kitchen activity, where Zareefa's daughter-in-law, Shakeela, sat hunched over the smoky stove cooking dinner. Her granddaughter, Asifa, sat near Zareefa, who leaned uncomfortably against the newspaper-plastered wall, obviously losing the battle against the winter.

The room was a telling *mise-en-scène*. A small withered figure, Zareefa's skin was paper-thin and crinkly beyond explanation. Her eyes were discernible only because of her Coke-bottle glasses, with one broken lens and the other side held up by thread. She was dressed in a *pheran*, which at some point must have boasted a color. Her grayish-blackish figure dissolved into the newspaper collage that had been glued onto the gaps in the wooden walls. From afar, Zareefa's faded and withered form could easily be mistaken for a picture on a newspaper, blending eerily with the headlines pasted on the walls in the background. Among the headlines, they read: "Revoke AFSPA, the draconian law," "Release all prisoners," "Machil fake encounter hearing postponed," "Protest outside high court, mass rape case dismissed." These newspapers had not been selected but were put to use randomly by the family. A kind trash collector had donated the newspapers to help them insulate the rooms. The random convergence of news that permeated everyday Kashmir became telling on Zareefa's walls,

providing a chilling context for the traumatic disappearance of her son and the banality of violence in the everyday lives of Kashmiris.

However, there was one newspaper page that Zareefa had deliberately pasted on the wall. Accompanying that headline was an image featuring Shakeela, Asifa, and Zareefa at an APDP protest. Asifa, the only one who could read and write in the family, had drawn a frame around their faces in black pen. In the picture Shakeela holds a photograph of Zahoor, while Asifa sits beside Zareefa, who appears to be weeping. “People who come to interview us take a photo of us sitting in front of that picture,” said Zareefa. In this instance I felt the distance between the archive and the repertoire collapsing. It was a generative scene framing and activating the sociality around the disappearance. The small room thus became a “practiced place,” as Michel De Certeau (1984: 28) has explained, suggesting that there is no such thing as place, for no place is free of history and social practice. For a moment I felt like I was witnessing a performance art installation, as if the newspaper collage existed in a broken timelessness. The room was bereft of most modern gadgetry; in the absence of the printing on the wall, the small stove, and the stainless steel cups, the room with its emaciated inhabitants could have been from oldtime Kashmir under some other tyrannical rule.

Zahoor’s picture hung near the ceiling, black and white against a blue background, mounted on inexpensive laminated cardboard. This was a generic version of the pictures that most APDP activists possess. Zareefa preferred to keep Zahoor away from her gaze. She said she could not bear “looking at his picture” if it was in front of her. As for Shakeela, she sat close to the wall, too close for the picture to be in focus for her. During one of my visits to the family, a photojournalist covering the story of enforced disappearances from New Delhi also came to visit. She took photographs of the family, the room, and the picture of the three of them pasted on the wall. She also took pictures of me as I sat amid the family members. In that click of the shutter, the traces of the disappeared, it seemed, remained in those left behind, and the activists, the kin—even me—all of us left behind were consigned as archives.

ARCHIVAL RESURRECTIONS AND ANNIHILATIONS: THREE NARRATIVES

Three ethnographic narratives exhibit the ways in which the archive exists, how it is used, and how it remains unused and unproductive. These narratives highlight how the archive constitutes an instrument of power and a tool of subjugation. According to Michel Foucault, the archive is the center of production of meaning or interpretation of narration. It becomes the law of what can be said. Foucault's (2002) understanding of the archive informs us that archives have power in creating a political and historical narrative. Can an archive collected by the kin of the disappeared be seen as a source of power? What kind of power does it wield? It is after all associated with knowledge or knowledge production. The dilemma of the kin of the disappeared inherently becomes what has been the dilemma of every knowledge-producing field of study: that of representation, interpretation, and meaning making. The archive becomes a vessel that gives shape and controls the perception of history and the manifestation of political reality.

The narratives of Jabbar Sharief, Masooda Parveen, and Fateh Jaan illustrate this. The first account is a verbatim rendition, a masterful soliloquy conjuring a resurrection, delivered by Jabbar Sharief, a forty-seven-year-old man whose brother, Mohsin, was disappeared by the army. The second account is the ethnographic narrative of Masooda Parveen, which illustrates the breadth of her archival impulse and the government's repression, which makes her archivization a mode of agency but ultimately futile for winning her case. The third account, that of Fateh Jaan, traces the hope and utter futility of the archive and the constant combat between memory and the stark truth of being annihilated by the military occupation.

The Power of the Archive: Jabbar Sharief

My first visit to Jabbar's home in South Kashmir was in late December.¹⁰ A

few days' worth of fallen snow stood in hardened heaps, creating roadblocks that would become muddy puddles once the sun decided to shine. Jabbar, an extremely hospitable man, poured warm cups of salt tea for me and a few friends who had introduced us. His eyes glistened against a deeply tanned face; his big, black hair blended into his abundant, well-groomed beard. Jabbar covered us all with huge blankets and gave each of us a *kanger* (hot coal brazier), and the low-ceilinged room grew cozier as we listened in rapt attention.

Jabbar's brother Mohsin disappeared after he was arrested in a crack-down along with three other boys from the neighborhood, who were later released. When I initially approached Jabbar's mother, Posheh, the plaintiff in the case for Mohsin's disappearance, for an interview, she declined. Throughout my fieldwork I was never able to meet her due to her precarious health. I finally gave up my idea of contacting her and resorted to talking only with Jabbar. As the eldest son, he had taken the responsibility of accompanying his mother when she went out to search for Mohsin. During my meeting with Jabbar, Posheh lay sick in an adjacent room. Jabbar worried constantly if she overheard our conversation that it would worsen her condition. He had lied to his mother, telling her we were colleagues from his office who had come to discuss his promotion. He said that this "little white lie had made her smile after a long time."

Jabbar's rendition of Mohsin's disappearance is included here for two reasons. First, it is a consummate treatise on a process of archivization that has been cobbled together to bolster the idea that a search is going on and the disappeared man might be found alive in detention. Second, the narrative locates the existence of nonhegemonic masculinities within Kashmir's dense militarization. The narrative centers on the disappearance of another man, and Jabbar, hapless, feeling emasculated, is on the brink of madness. Jabbar begins with the struggle that he and his mother have waged by insisting that Mohsin has been "incarcerated" for nineteen years and is not dead. According to Jabbar, he began accompanying his mother in the search for Mohsin because "she had not ever ventured into the outside world alone, and the only outing she knew was back and forth from their

paddy fields.” Jabbar’s account is reproduced verbatim below, interspersed only with customary affirmative guttural sounds on my part, which in Kashmir is a sign of respectful, active listening. Jabbar needed little direction and even less nudging to go on.

Jabbar put a massive sheaf of papers before us, documents collected over the years which have become, as he called it, “Mohsin’s *zabardast* file” (Mohsin’s forceful/powerful file). Jabbar’s narrative underscores many dilemmas that a disappearance produces, where documents act as propellers, not of justice as much as an undying hope. I fear that meddling with the narrative would constrain the paths Jabbar traverses, which are important for readers to assimilate on their own. The narrative as reproduced verbatim here is a haunting that allows for entering the depths of mourning, melancholia, agency, memory making, and resistance. It is centered around the figure of the mother: her physical absence, struggle, and precarious mental health reveal how agency and resistance come together in the utterly repressive environment of Kashmir, which has become a de facto penal colony. It is also illustrative of the powerlessness that Kashmiri men face and how they attempt to overcome the challenges a militarized government poses to their traditional “protector” status.

Jabbar’s Account

Praise be to the Lord, we have been able to make a file that every afsar [official] is amazed. It has taken years, but with the help of the invisible, supreme divine, we have found success. We proved everyone wrong—my brother is alive and well. As you know, Mohsin had made friends with a young teacher; they used to play cricket together a lot. This teacher later became a Mujahid. Mohsin was arrested because of this connection; otherwise, he was begunah [innocent] and his file proves it.

After Mohsin disappeared in custody, we tried to file an FIR, which was not accepted by the police. After almost nineteen years, my mother was able to finally lodge a complaint with the police. People who know us well, they respect our struggle and dedication to find my brother. Mohsin’s file is

formidable, and it can put the army and bureaucrats in jail forever. My mother is over ninety now and in fragile health. We have done what we needed to do to make this file. Now we are waiting. My mother said this morning that she feels Mohsin will return this year. If the divine unseen wills it, yes, why not?

When we show our file to the army officers, they are wonderstruck. They ask us, "How did you make a file like this?" In the beginning, as I said, we did not even have an FIR, but we pieced our record together. We have ensured that several copies of this file stay in safe places. There is always the fear that they [the government agencies] will disappear the file as well.

When Mohsin was forcibly disappeared, my mother and I searched for him everywhere, but to no avail. My mother's health diminished. She went into a depression after the other boys [who had been arrested with Mohsin] were released. She thought Mohsin might be dead. She got so sick sometimes that we would recite the kalima on her. ¹¹ It was of utmost importance to me that she become convinced that Mohsin was in a jail and would return one day. I knew that type of hope would help her live. As her eldest son, I had the responsibility to preserve her life and sanity. I had to; I had to do something to assure her that Mohsin would return, and that would prolong her life. I did not know what I could do, but the invisible divine paved the way.

I know this for certain, for I saw it with my own two eyes. In the first three years after Mohsin was arrested, I saw him approximately twelve times. I would bribe a policeman or a soldier here or there and sneak into army camps. Initially, Mohsin was kept in camps around our village. My regret is that all the times I saw Mohsin, Mother would not be with me. But she trusted what I saw inside the army camp. A guy who had been held in the same jail as Mohsin came to meet us after he was released. He told us that Mohsin was alive and well. Inside the jail, Mohsin was well respected by other prisoners, and he was also leading the prayers. We came to know our little Mohsin had grown a long beard and was reading big books on religion. Mother would always be happy to receive such news. For the first

three years, we got news of his well-being from other prisoners who were released, but after that we heard nothing.

Our biggest breakthrough happened one day when a superintendent of police [SP], whose door we had been hounding for months, agreed to meet us. My mother cried a sea in front of the SP, her tears falling as big as hailstones. She told the SP how I had seen Mohsin many times and how we had received news of his well-being inside the jail often, but we had never formally received permission to meet him. When he asked us where Mohsin was currently detained, we told him we did not know for sure, but had heard a rumor that he was in an army camp in the neighboring village. The SP was saddened to see our sorry state. He wrote a parchi [short notes, pieces of paper] to the commanding army officer of the camp requesting that we be allowed to meet Mohsin. This parchi was the first document written by a person of authority to support our plea. It supported our claim that Mohsin was incarcerated and not dead. Mother was joyous. It was a miracle that the SP had written the parchi for us. She saw it as proof that Mohsin was with the authorities and alive. You tell me, when a big afsar [officer] writes that his family be allowed to meet Mohsin, what is he admitting to? That Mohsin had not been killed but was in detention.

When we took the parchi to the army officer, he told us he would arrange a meeting and told us to come back after a week. My mother cooked a chicken. She went to the market, bought new fabric to stitch a new kurta-pajama [tunic-trousers] for Mohsin. During these years, whenever our hopes of meeting Mohsin rose, Mother's vigor would return. She attained a positive state of mind. These events, I am sure, lengthened her life. It made me happy.

After an agonizing week passed, we went to the army officer, but he had no information for us, and we went back to the SP. The SP was very respectful. He asked Mother to move from the uncomfortable chair in front of his desk to the plush sofa at the side of the room. He ordered tea for us while he made calls. Later, he asked me for the parchi he had previously given. He then took his pen, gazed at the note, deep in thought, and then added "with compliments." He gave us the name of another army officer

and told us to meet him. As we left, mother was feeling pensive. But I told her not to worry, since writing “with compliments” was a good sign; isn’t it? After we met the army officer, he suggested we visit jails outside the Valley. And we did, many times, but nothing came of it.

One day, I saw the army officer who was head of the regiment that I knew had Mohsin in its custody. He was buying incense, probably for his puja [Hindi word for Hindu worship ritual]. He was in his bulletproof jeep, and I ran to greet him. He knew all about Mohsin’s case. He once told me that he had read Mohsin’s dossier carefully. He told me to be patient and that I should not talk to many people about our case. He would ask me to visit him in the camp many times, promising to give information about Mohsin. My friends became worried for me. They would tell me frequently, going inside the army camp could raise suspicions that Mother and I had become army informers. But we did not care; we wanted to give it [the search] all we had.

Soon after, Mother fell ill again. She could hardly get out of bed. She was depressed and cried all the time. Over the years, she began losing her eyesight. I was also in the midst of a divorce. My wife was frustrated with me. I was exhausted with her endless complaining about my mother and me being obsessive about Mohsin’s case. I agree that our continuous search for Mohsin contributed to the stress in our marriage. Many people had begun calling me motth [crazy, also has spiritual intonation], dewaneh [crazed], and pagal [often used to refer to being medically insane]. ¹² I agree. Be chuss mout, dewana [I am crazy/crazed]. To be searching like we have been, we had to be, but I am not pagal . Our type of struggle needs faith. My wife also thought I had lost mental balance. When I insisted that I had seen Mohsin twelve times, she said I was just hallucinating and that Mohsin had been killed during the first few days in custody. She said the whole world knew and that only Mother and I did not want to accept the fact. This made me furious; I told her not to tell this to Mother, because she could die if she heard this. My friends would gently hint that I see a psychiatrist, but trust me, my dear hamsheera [sister], they did not know what I knew. They did

not see the power of the parchi we had. Mohsin was coming alive in the documents, even if we did not see or meet him. He was resurrected.

The boys who were arrested with Mohsin confirmed to us that he was alive when they were released. They said the army had killed two men inside the camp (whose bodies were later found), but Mohsin had been spared. The other ones arrested that day in the region, if not released, were also in jails. I tell you, all the boys are alive. All the disappeared boys, I tell you, they are safe in jails till a solution to Kashmir is found. Hindustaan Samraj [the Indian empire] is holding them as ransom or something like that. I told my mother this, and I tell you the same with confidence.

Till now, we have found nothing about Mohsin through the government officials or the military. But tell you what: we have had a strong divine intervention, a miracle from the Unseen [God]. One day, when I was very worried for my mother's health, I met a mystic, who became my pir [spiritual guide]. I finally decided that the time had come to take our application for Mohsin to greater offices that are located in the mystical dimensions. My pir is a bigger king—bigger than the president of India. My pir assured me Mohsin was okay and gave me a little chunk of soil. I gave the soil to Mother for safekeeping. I told her of my new strategy for finding Mohsin. She was on board. She has aqeedat [belief] in our Kashmiri spiritual traditions more than me. The very next day, I met a mysterious man who gave me a clue about Mohsin's whereabouts in a nearby camp, and it led to success. Mother became ecstatic to get this news. She got out of bed and began making preparations for a prayer ceremony for Mohsin. The man told me to show Mohsin's photograph to some boys who were often forced into begaar [forced unpaid labor] by the army and who knew the inmates inside the camp. One boy confirmed that Mohsin was in that very camp. It was a miracle done by my pir. Even if we were not able to meet Mohsin face-to-face, Mother got better after hearing this news.

The army would force the detainees to become "cats" [informers], who would identify people supporting armed struggle or the militants in identification parades. I came to know that they were using Mohsin as a cat, and I also heard that Mohsin was not helping catch anyone. After this

news, I tried to bribe my way around the camp to see when they would bring Mohsin out, in the hope that we could wait and maybe Mother could sneak a glance somehow. Even though my little brother was proven 100 percent innocent, the army treated him as if he was a big militant. We have all the documents that prove he had nothing to do with militancy. The documents from his college, his principal, even the character certificates from the state's own officers prove he was just a college-going young man. But the army was bent on making Mohsin an informer. The boys forced to do begaar [forced labor] told me that Mohsin was not agreeing to become an army informer. He was being beaten and tortured more and more. I would tell Mother only the news of his sightings, but not of the torture.

As the spring season approached, the boys told me that the prisoners were being given lunch out in the open. They told me to find a way to get into the camp during lunchtime and see Mohsin for myself. One day, my mother and I sat at the camp's gate from dawn prayers onward. Finally, after much pleading with the sentry, only I was allowed inside, and that too, on the pretext of meeting the commanding officer. I sneaked toward the ground before entering the office and saw the prisoners in a long queue. They were very, very far from me, but I saw Mohsin holding his plate. It was not easy to discern if it was really him. But I am sure; I have raised him since he was a young child. I can make out his profile even if he is on the moon. When I told my mother I had seen him, it was enough to bring her back from the dead. She regained her health. My pir had assured me that we would meet with success, and we did. I had hoped after this I would surely meet Mohsin, but it turned out to be the last sighting.

Soon after, another phase began. The army officer began threatening us, so we would withdraw our case against them. The soldiers would frequently raid our house. We would all be beaten, including my children, and I would be detained for days. I did not tell my mother, but the army would send ikhwanees to harass me at work. And she herself many times had to face the soldiers and ikhawanees alone when she was in the paddy field. They would come to threaten her to give up pursuing the case. But listen, we are not weak people; my pir had our back. One day, my mother and I were at the

civil secretariat, and what can I say . . . a letter came from above.¹³ The clerk blurted out that something had arrived in the mail pertaining to Mohsin's case. I had a hunch that another miracle had already happened. I pleaded with the clerk to show us the letter. My mother wept, her tears falling like huge hailstones, in front of the officer. I pleaded that we be allowed to copy the letter. I did not know what was written in the letter, but I knew it was something that would help Mother to get her health back.

The sympathetic clerk let me copy the letter, in which one top government official was supporting the police officer who had initially written the parchi for us. This was again a miracle. Someone so high up, the administration had supported that we be allowed to meet Mohsin, which implied that he was not dead. This letter made Mother happy. But like always, we had a paper trail but no clue of where Mohsin actually was. But don't you think this letter was enough to silence those who said I was pagal ? I had pleaded with a local politician to help in having this letter issued. He told me to wait and "stay quiet." He assured me that Mohsin would be released one day as suddenly as he had been disappeared. He appreciated the file we were building in defense of Mohsin. But as you already know, nothing more happened, and years passed. My mother was devastated.

After nine years of searching, another miracle happened. The district commissioner [DC], whom we were pursuing for help, gave us a document, which became "dangerous" evidence against the army officers. Even the brigadier of the army was unnerved and contacted me secretly. He told me that he would help us look for Mohsin discreetly and to give up the court case. When I told this to the DC, who was very respectful of Mother, he held our file in his hands. He read and reread it in silence for a solid half-hour. Imagine such a big officer spending so much time on our file. He kept sighing. After a long silence, he looked me in the eye and said that we had built a very strong file and that we should not withdraw the case from the court. The DC was a God-fearing man; I tell you, there are not many officers like him. He gave us a letter addressed to the brigadier, in which he strongly insisted that we be allowed to meet Mohsin, and that he had discussed the case with us. After this strong proof that indicated Mohsin

was incarcerated, what more proof did we need to show he was alive and innocent? I did not have Mohsin to show to people, but we had documentary proof. Mother decided to celebrate this news at home with a big prayer gathering, followed by a feast, inviting all the relatives and neighbors. We hosted such events many times when we had a breakthrough in the case, and as I said, it made Mother happy and hopeful of Mohsin's return.

Sadly, after writing this strong letter, the DC was called by the governor. Then I heard through the grapevine that the DC had been almost fired for issuing such an order and meddling in the army's affairs. When I met him to apologize, he was as humble as ever. He told me not to worry and to make sure Mother regained her health. He once again appreciated how hard we had worked on Mohsin's file. He told me, "This kind of file is made once in a lifetime." He also said that he was very sure that the army had no intention of releasing Mohsin, because they alleged he was a high-level operative. I told him that was a lie. He said he knew that, and that the army was known to play such games where they framed civilians to show that they were successful in catching the top militants and earn awards and promotions. Many times, these army officers have made me do foolish things. Once they asked me to help in catching the same Mujahid that Mohsin was friends with. They promised that if I helped catch him, they would deliver Mohsin to our doorstep. When I expressed my inability to do so, the army man told me, "When you can make such a strong file, how is it that you can't find a militant? Even God can't see your brother at this moment, but if you help us, we will deliver your brother to you."

Once the army detained me for many days, threatening so we would quit searching for Mohsin. By this time I was unafraid for my life. I openly told the soldiers that Mohsin was not dead and that I had tricked them by sneaking into their camp and sighted him many times. They laughed at me, calling me crazy. When they patrolled our neighborhood, I would shout at them. Sometimes they called me bad names, and some just beat me. I was unafraid. People gave me up for mad, saying I would be killed any day. And once they almost did. I barely survived after the soldiers tried to shoot me.

Once the soldiers told me they were detaining me frequently because I was their entertainment. They said that my preposterous stories kept them from getting bored. My perseverance in searching for Mohsin was such that a soldier once told me that I had become their stalker. This had never happened before. I know very well that I became a big thorn in the army's side. A clerk in the police station that I had befriended told me the army had me on their hit list. They would kill me. But no one knew the power of my pir, who is my divine navigator. I knew what to do in order to safeguard my life. I made sure I constantly remained on the radar of top bureaucrats and politicians. They knew all about my case. I would go to meet them and plead my case and tell them what was happening to our family. Over the years they came to know my mother and me very well. If the soldiers killed me, I am sure there would be some noise. Not that the soldiers would be punished, they never are, but it would become news and people would protest. What kind of stupid government will let that happen? But then, India is pagal and so is Kashmir's chief minister.

My spiritual guide has protected my mother and me. My pir might not have a huge office in the secretariat, and even if he will sit on the roadside gutter, he will perform bigger miracles that these government slaves in big offices will not even start to understand. The ilm [knowledge] of the spiritual-ists is different from the one possessed by the slaves of the material world [bureaucrats/army/politicians]. My pir does not need to sit on a throne to show he is the king; he can move mountains without lifting a finger.

After that strong letter from the DC yielded nothing, we realized that the legal or the administrative route was not for us. Everything that had happened so far had been a miracle of my pir and the Unseen. The success in preserving my mother's life was a miracle of God and that of my pir. Do you think we or you or these officers run the world? No one runs the order of this world except the invisible divine. We had already sought the spiritual intervention of our pir, and he was pursuing Mohsin's application in God's divine court. The earthly courts, the SHRC [State Human Rights Commission], these government offices are all subordinate to the divine

invisible power. Our spiritual guide is a conduit for God, and he is capable of all miracles. Ever since following him, we have found success; we built a strong file. Our records are proof of our Mohsin's life and innocence. The survival of my mother and brother is his miracle. People often think that I am mad. I do not blame them, for they do not see what I see; they do not know what a strong file we have. The day this file begins talking, not only Mohsin but every other Kashmiri prisoner will also be released.

What is this game of safeguarding our human rights that the government plays with us? They don't think of us as human. What comes of them saying we have rights? Lip service. Who are these politicians who run the administration? All turbans on a stick. In Kashmir every little order comes from Delhi, and these puppets in Kashmir just nod. They shit only after Delhi gives them permission. I have lost faith in everything—everything that I see, that I touch. One day, my spiritual guide took me to meet another man of elevated mystic status. He said to me and my mother, "Be happy. There is no reason to be unhappy." I remind my mother often that we have no reason to be unhappy. See how many intelligent and accomplished men—like the director general of police, additional secretary of home, and the district magistrate—endorsed the fact that we be allowed to meet Mohsin. It all points to the fact that Mohsin is alive. Our worst fear, that he was killed, was disproven, and that is all that matters; this little fact has helped in keeping my mother alive. See, the jail authorities are now indebted to care for my brother's life. Even if I do not see him anymore, I keep tabs on his welfare wherever he is detained. I have come to know through my sources that he gets weekly medical checkups and is not physically tortured much now. A boy from another village, who was detained in the same jail as Mohsin, told me this. Earlier, he said Mohsin had been offered a briefcase full of money in lieu of any information about his Mujahid friend, but he refused. That someone had seen Mohsin and had been with him made Mother very happy, but I did not tell her that he had received solitary confinement as punishment for refusing to divulge information.

As we speak today, I know in my heart and through my belief in the spiritual divine that Mohsin is safe and in a better place. Now we have stopped going to officers for any help. I know nothing worldly will get him released and only dua [prayer] will work. My mother and I have only one thing to be indebted to for our success in having such a strong case, and that is our pir's support. We cannot ever repay him. If we can't kiss our spiritual guide's feet to show our gratitude when we meet, we feel empty. We follow his ilm . This worldly knowledge, laws, human rights is trash. It yields nothing. People need to know there is another world, and without spiritual guidance, we cannot survive. It gives you better ways of waging worldly battles and becoming successful against tyranny.

The army and the civil officers told my mother to apply for ex gratia relief. She refused to receive any money. We said, if we even piss on that kind of money, it is our piss that will get dirty. We Kashmiris have been turned into a nation that is lost. We are forced into becoming hypocrites—hide our true feelings, which is not our natural trait. We are forced by India to turn against our own, but we are majboor [coerced], and even God will forgive us our trespasses, which people do in desperation to survive.

People call me crazy, but I will be redeemed when Mohsin returns. But I am also prepared that the world will have turned into ashes till truth appears. I have kept the file in many places, and even if the army or the administration disappears it, I have made sure there are enough copies left. As a safeguard, I maintain a correspondence about Mohsin's file with everyone in the administration. I have written to every prime minister of India, chief minister of Kashmir, presidents of political parties, and politicians. I used to send my letters by post and never get any acknowledgment or a receipt. Then I had an idea to send them by courier, and that way, I have proof of sending them. I am weaving a web of records; I am like a patient spider waiting to catch a fly. This file will come in handy the day India is taken to task. I think of the day when I will sit with my file smiling, and Indian lawmakers will be standing in kath-heri [a witness box] awaiting punishment. I might not live to see it, and people may think I am

crazy, but not just my brother but all the disappeared are safe; they are in custody, and their release is connected to the final solution of Kashmir.



Jabbar's narrative is based on his nineteen-year struggle of searching for Mohsin. His rendition manifests as Mohsin's file passing through the bureaucratic and military maze. I stitched this explanation together after talking to other people about Mohsin's disappearance, including neighbors, relatives, and especially a family whose son was also disappeared by the Indian army, with whom Jabbar's mother maintained close relations. Since Mohsin's disappearance, Jabbar's mother, like the women activists of the APDP, has run from pillar to post in search of her son. Together Jabbar and his mother have tried everything in their power to uncover some clue about Mohsin.

Jabbar's account traces the subaltern agency of a man who has no recourse to ameliorate his own and his mother's suffering, except a long and futile pursuit of justice. He pieces together evidence that seemingly is no evidence at all. He starts his narrative by mentioning "success." What does he mean by success? An obvious success would have been finding the whereabouts of Mohsin, either alive or dead, but in Jabbar's perception "success" is defined by making the file, which in the chronology of his rendition implies that Mohsin is alive. This flicker of an assumption has been gleaned from the words carefully crafted by either a sympathetic or a routinely attentive police officer, who by ethnicity is a Kashmiri as well. This is a pivotal document in Mohsin's resurrection as being alive but incarcerated—twin hopes that sustain Jabbar's mother and, by implication, Jabbar himself.

The file gains traction after the tiniest sliver of inference can be drawn from the SP's note about Mohsin being alive. The *parchi* states: "Complainant says she has been trying to meet her son. Please hear her and take further appropriate action." This note does not specify anything else but that the family wants to meet their son. This note is stark and brief. It is

not written on a letterhead, does not contain the name of the officer, nor any official stamp. A few crisscrossed lines masquerade as a signature at the end. As Veda Charrow (1982) has observed about bureaucratic writing, the note does not give any clue of its author. It carries an impersonal tone. It is clear that the writer was trying to forward the query but was cautious with words. As stated earlier, in Kashmir's repressive political climate, no one wants to be held accountable for stating facts or making decisions. The civilian government has become increasingly sluggish, which has touched chronic levels since 1989 amid the volatile and complex political atmosphere, where officers are afraid of such penalizations as transfer, early retirement, or dismissal of civil servants who stay tied to former ruling parties or who are perceived to have anti-India political leanings. As such, any bureaucratic document can become a ticking time bomb. Thus the precise specification of authorship often becomes a source of considerable anxiety to government officers, evident in the way the referral note that Jabbar has acquired from the officer has been put together. This is not unique.

According to Jabbar, the SP was convinced of writing them a *parchi* only after Jabbar and his mother had pleaded with him for months, arguing that Mohsin had been sighted more than ten times. While narrating this, to convince me that the sightings were true and not illusions, Jabbar, with a distinguished affectation, touched his eyes gingerly and said that he had seen Mohsin with "yemow chasmow" (these eyes) while invoking an oath on Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. This elaborate gesture, use of the Persian term for eyes, and the oath on what is most holy to an observant Muslim was meant to bolster the veracity of the incident.

To follow this story, I met the now retired SP to know more about the *parchi* he wrote. During our conversation it was evident to me that the note held no unique significance for the ex-officer. He did not remember the mother-son duo clearly but acknowledged that in his career he had written thousands such *parchis* to aid families in their dealings with the army and police. For this former cop the *parchi* was merely a routine, generic note that he must have written as an informal gesture of compassion. "I knew

most people could not be helped,” he told me, “but they felt it would help them. It was dangerous for us to recommend everyone who came to us for *sifarish* [recommendation], not knowing the cases very well, so we had to be extra cautious.” The former officer surely did not realize the significance his note held for Jabbar and his mother. For them the *parchi* had become foundational in implying that Mohsin was alive somewhere, since it was an officer validating the possibility by writing that they be aided in meeting Mohsin. The *parchi* was processed through other officers, who mechanically made remarks only to push it from their desks, without any tangible intervention. One more officer had added a few more lines, saying: “The fact of the detainee being in custody has been conveyed to this concerned officer by Mohsin Ahmed’s mother and brother and to the aforementioned official who drafted the note and who has recommended permission be granted for meeting the alleged detainee. Hence it is requested by the undersigned that the matter may be taken up as due as had been proposed by officers before.”

This addition by another forwarding officer is elaborate in memoing and seems to defer the responsibility for any kind of decision. As Mathew Hull (2012) has illustrated, in the case of such bureaucratic procedures, reconstructing the authorship of a decision developed through nested memos, like *parchi* in Mohsin’s file, becomes a complex task demanding the gathering of separate artifacts, dispersed in different locations. As such, Mohsin’s file was passed up by the officers for “comments” to other departments of administration, police, and army, who were always “concerned,” but not directly, and thus were most disconnected and nonproductive in their bureaucratic deferrals and irrelevant delegations.

Mohsin’s file itself, when perused, is a complicated mesh of documents procured through the circulatory procedures of going from office to office. The travel of memos and other documents through the bowels of bureaucracy is slow and converges in red tape. Everyone is caught in this slow-moving sludge—the family, the administration, and seemingly everyone is implicated in its futility. The fact that laws like AFSPA (the Armed Forces Special Powers Act), which are prevalent in Kashmir, make

any kind of immediate resolve impossible makes the administration and judiciary norms doubly incoherent and unproductive. The circulation of this file ends in the civil administration and begins its journey to further languish in the procedures of the army's offices. Finally, a case of human rights violations—one that even names the perpetrator—ends with a single note addressed to India's Ministry of Home Affairs, which in the past twenty years has denied sanction for persecution in fifty cases recommended against army personnel (Ganai 2018).

Despite the administrators and law officers avoiding making decisions and escaping any future consequences, the file keeps making the rounds in the bureaucratic chain of command. The passage of most files that travel the bureaucratic entrails, including those like Mohsin's, is interestingly also entered in the office record diary. While the procedure of movement between offices may not produce any result, the process of recirculation gets recorded, leaving trace upon trace as it gathers new memos and initials of officers who read it or through whose departments it passes. It is by entering into these circulations that the *parchi* for Mohsin collects more memos and signatures, building on the originary writing. Even though it accrues nothing but deferral, the *parchi* becomes a foundation on which Jabbar constructs a seemingly evidence-based narrative of his brother's incarceration. As Foucault (1991) would say, the file gets inextricably linked to power and power relations with its numerous acknowledgments, signatures, metatext, and copies, and becomes meaning-producing, even if not producing Mohsin himself. Mohsin's existence is traced in the set of documents marking both his subjection and objectification. The file manifests as a mode of power that within a system of discursivity (Foucault 1972), which functions as evidence of him being alive somewhere, provides evidence and authenticity for the family. For them, Mohsin is reanimated by connections between documents, juxtapositions of memos, and a matrix of citations. Even though Mohsin is materially disappeared, these documents become the "official truth" (see Imroz et al. 2012).

The file also becomes an iconic product of the excesses of power. Jabbar fears that Mohsin's file may be disappeared by the government. He

has made several copies of it, which are hidden in different places. In many cases, people like Jabbar who follow the legal and bureaucratic procedures try to hide the key documents, because the militarized government is bent on eradicating any evidence. But even when the authorities destroy a file, it continues as a ghost through its multiple recordings in the annals of the government itself. The power of the file is paradoxical: it has the potential to hold the government and its machinery accountable, but at the same time it cannot bring anyone to account. Currently Mohsin's case is in cold storage. Jabbar and his mother have resorted to divine intervention—the Unseen—and taking hope from a different *ilm* (knowledge), which they consider more powerful than the government.

The Looted Archive: Masooda Parveen's Account

Masooda Parveen opened a tin trunk full of papers. “This is my treasure, and this is what I will take to Geneva, God willing,” she said, expressing her intention to appeal to the United Nations.¹⁴ Masooda's husband, Mohidin Regoo, had been subjected to numerous enforced disappearances or “incommunicado detentions” before the army finally killed him in custody. The tin trunk in the middle of Masooda's little room seemed like a slim, rectangular tombstone, and a haunting of documents permeated the air.¹⁵

Masooda Parveen's archive serves as a testament to archival violence and to how the archive itself can be killed and looted. Her husband's story is not unique. Regoo was a well-respected lawyer in his area. He also ran a small business, selling saffron.¹⁶ Regoo plunged into deep debts after he lost money as a result of the theft of a consignment of saffron. His business partners wanted their share plus profits back. Regoo sold all his property to raise the money, but his partners claimed his debt had not been settled.

In the 1990s, when the local government broke down, it became a common practice to seek arbitration from the militants. It seemed routine when Regoo's business partners approached a local militant outfit to negotiate their dispute on the remaining debt. Regoo had many meetings

with the militants in an effort to convince them that he had paid the entire amount. Finally, Masooda, always brave and resourceful herself, met the militant commander and successfully pleaded their case. Convinced, the commander declared the matter resolved. However, this brush with the militants seemed to produce long-standing repercussions on Regoo's life. The Indian army arrested Regoo, alleging he was involved in militancy based on his meetings with the militants to negotiate the debt. Masooda claims this was a ruse to frame her husband. "The army knew the truth," she said. "That he was just a lawyer and had a dispute with his business partners. They used him to create *khauf* [terror]. My husband was an unlucky scapegoat." In the ensuing years, Regoo was routinely arrested. For months, Masooda would know nothing about her husband's whereabouts, and during these periods he would be technically disappeared.

In 1996, for the first time after the rise of armed militancy and the suspension of the local civilian administration, the electoral process in Kashmir was being restarted. The Indian government was ferreting out proxy candidates by tapping old political hands, willing opportunists, and reluctant civilians. As one of the most credible persons in his area, Regoo had been a choice target, and the army had from the start tried to coerce him into accepting a nomination. Regoo, being a staunch supporter of Kashmir's liberation from India, abhorred pro-India politics and consistently refused. While Masooda was pleading for his release during one of Regoo's many incarcerations, an army officer told her to convince Regoo to stand for elections or be ready for a dangerous outcome. An army officer told Masooda that if Regoo agreed, "he would become a powerful man, and all his needs would be taken care of, allegations would go away, and his debts repaid."

To avoid further harassment, Regoo secretly began planning to emigrate from Kashmir, but before he could do so, he was arrested and ultimately killed in custody. "His six-foot-tall frame was half the size," Masooda said, describing the state of Regoo's dead body. The last time Regoo was arrested, Masooda said, she knew that the forces intended to kill him. She recalled that the *ikhwanees* accompanying the raiding soldiers, who

incidentally was known to the family, began dragging Regoo from room to room and hacking at his body with an axe, leaving pools of blood throughout the house. “They [the army] had the intention to kill him,” she said. “It was clear, they wanted to make *dahshat* [terror] to teach him a lesson for saying no to India, and also other people who might have followed his example.”

Soon after Regoo was taken into custody, the army alleged that he was killed in a bomb blast in a nearby mountainside named Wastuurwan. Masooda believed that her husband’s body was rigged and blown up to cover his custodial murder, and she filed for action against the army in court. She launched a judicial fight in the Kashmiri courts as well as the Supreme Court of India. Her writ petition initially included that ex gratia compensation be paid to her. “I did not know better,” she clarified. “I was naïve, about how to get justice. I thought that was the only way I could complain against the Indian criminals. Otherwise, getting monetary compensation was not my main motive.” Later, a sympathetic Indian lawyer agreed to represent Masooda in the Supreme Court of India. Confident of winning the case, the new lawyer broadened the scope to include curbing the special powers that the armed forces had in Kashmir. In the Supreme Court the respondents from the army declined to produce the original police record. Instead, they presented a shadow file from which several significant passages were missing. An independent report states the following:

During the numerous hearings that took place in the Supreme Court over the nine-year pendency of the writ petition, several orders were passed by the Court directing the State of Jammu and Kashmir to produce the original records relating to the inquest under section 174 CrPC. Not only did the State of J&K disappear from the scene for several years, when it re-surfaced, it produced a “shadow file” (which did not contain several important documents/records which are usually part of [an] official police case file) on the pretext that the original file had been “lost.” (Public Commission on Human Rights [J&K] and People’s Union for Democratic Rights [Delhi] 2007)

The army’s response was put on the record, and Masooda’s counsel inferred that an attempt was being made to conceal the truth. As per its claim, the army did not produce any documents either to prove that Regoo

was a Pakistani-trained militant or that he had any association with the militants, which the army had been using as its defense in the custodial killing. The shadow file contained other important documents, such as the post mortem report, which went missing. According to Afsana Rashid (2007), “The shadow file was created in no time, and it was presented in an even greater hurry. The precedence is that when such a case is filed in court, the documents produced should also be accessible to the opposing party. However, in the case of Regoo, as soon as the shadow file was produced, the court delivered its verdict without fulfilling the necessary formalities.”

After nine years, the Supreme Court pronounced its judgment dismissing the writ petition on the grounds that there was not an iota of evidence to support the petitioners’ plea. Disregarding the incomplete nature of the shadow file, it stated: “We have the army and police record pertaining to the incident, which clearly show that Regoo was indeed a militant and that the circumstances leading to his death were as per the circumstances put on record by the respondents.”¹⁷ The Supreme Court of India supported the army’s version that the deceased had been a militant. The evidence that Regoo was not a militant was disregarded. The state thus committed a double murder: first, it killed Regoo in custody, and then it killed the documents that could have been pivotal in proving his noninvolvement with militancy as well as his illegal detainment and frequent disappearances in custody.

Masooda preserved the documents that the army purged, proving how impossible it is to unarchive. The documents therefore have left a trace—not only in versions that Masooda preserves but also in their multiple inscriptions in the government archives. Like Jabbar, Masooda stashes copies of her file in various places, which she says will bring truth to light when “time is on her side.” Even when documents disappear from government records, they continue to “lurk,” leaving traces, though dispersed and hard to find, but even harder to exterminate completely and waiting to go off against the authorities. The government destroyed the archive that Masooda had pieced together to save the army personnel, who were tried in Regoo’s custodial murder. This power is the basis of

nationalism, which appears as the desire to kill and burn another's memory, to silence and delete traces of traumatic events within the archive (Derrida 1996). By disowning Regoo as a "killable" militant and a threat to the Indian nation, the government transferred the attributes of this death to ensure that the law, even while depleted of ethics, remained on its side.

In this archival war with a Kashmiri widow, the government remembered to save the army and erase Regoo. Nevertheless, given Masooda's archival repertoire of collecting and preserving the documents, she deploys them as what she calls a "weapon" in her search for justice. This archival impulse becomes an analytic for understanding how documentation emerges not only as a formal mechanism of getting justice but also as a way of memory and posterity. The discourse around the archive transforms memorabilia and memory-traces to make them worthy of becoming political and social recollections. This archive enables the women, as historical subjects, to keep alive the political and cultural memory around these documents, which will otherwise disappear under the military regime.

THE USELESS ARCHIVE: FATEH JAAN'S ACCOUNT

There is another side to the archive. In its circulatory process of being generated and pursued from office to office, in the struggle to procure it, the lives of the kin become routinely enmeshed with that of the disappeared for a long time to come. Instead of dealing with mundane everyday social rituals around the physical presence of a person, like cooking or cleaning for or with a person, it becomes getting that one document, that one certificate to prove that he passed high school or a note from some officer to recommend the case. While the disappearance entails subtraction of the life rituals of the disappeared, archivization seems to fill this gap by creating a new kind of routine. It becomes a protracted mourning in the case of an unprecedented predicament—the enforced disappearance—of which retrieval is a significant component, even if impossible but always

imminent. The archive has a special place in this routine, evident in the life of Fateh Jaan, a forty-year-old half-widow.

One afternoon, Fateh met me under the Chinar trees opposite an army bunker, near the famous Poloview Road in Srinagar, a landmark from British colonial times. After years of running between offices, she was finally able to procure a death certificate for her husband, Naseeb Khan, who had been disappeared by the Indian armed forces army in 2002. Looking past me, Fateh said: “Hum ko unn ki maut ki certificate mill gayee; ab dua karo woh zinda hoon [We got his death certificate; now, please pray he is alive].”¹⁸ It was an oxymoronic expression. In the same breath Fateh enmeshed a decree of death and a wish for life for her husband, Naseeb Khan. Her life manifested an unending paradox, straddling a world of hope and despair, where despair mostly had the upper hand.

Fateh showed me the death certificate in a hurry as she tried to reach another part of the city to meet Baba Khair, a *pir*. She had been a devotee of the seer specifically since Naseeb had disappeared. Baba would divine Naseeb’s predicament and offer prayers for his safe return. As she leapt toward a bus, I imagined Fateh putting the talisman that Baba would give her in the same satchel that held the death certificate. She would then proceed toward her home, where her five children awaited her. The youngest one, Zaina, who had never seen her father, would once again dream of him coming back. She would often wake in a screaming fit after this dream, and in a few moments the entire household would melt into tears. Hardly anyone would go back to sleep. Fateh would lament Naseeb’s disappearance, and curse “Hindustan,” the “Hindustani” army, her fate, and the politicians who had brought Kashmir to destruction. Since Naseeb’s disappearance, this had been the pattern of grief and hope in Fateh Jaan’s household that I watched in close quarters.

Fateh Jaan lives in a small hamlet outside Srinagar. Her tiny, unfinished brick house is nestled in the foothills of the Zabarwan Mountains, overlooking the velvety paddy fields below. Looking at her house, one would expect ruddy faces and happy smiles to emerge from the doorway,

but what welcomes you instead is Fateh's deeply lined face, the starkness of her home, and the near nakedness of her children with their pasty, chapped faces in the approaching Himalayan winter. Fateh's eldest daughter, Rubina, was seventeen years old at the time. Hanief, her second-born, was fifteen; followed by Nauman, then fourteen, Ayman, then thirteen, and Zaina, then eleven. In 2002 the army had taken Naseeb Khan from their *kotha* , a temporary residence in the mountains, where Fateh's pastoral clan lives during the summer months, tending to the livestock of big cattle farmers. One afternoon, Naseeb was sleeping when a patrolling party showed up, which was not unusual in itself. It was routine for soldiers to come around and beat and torture the men in their own homes, questioning them about militant movement in the mountains.

The women also received beatings, but more than that, they had to endure obscenities, ogling, and physical harassment of a direct sexual nature. Remembering their behavior, Fateh trembled with anger and labeled it *besharam* [shameless]. She recalled some visits more easily than others, when the soldiers would only demand water or tea and resort to mild kicking, slapping, and badmouthing. "It was very unpredictable," Fateh said. "I would just keep chanting holy verses from the Quran to get it over with." The army would show up at people's doors at any time, especially during the night, inquiring about militants seeking refuge in homes. People would acquiesce for various reasons. There was the fear of the gun, of retribution if one refused, but many willingly offered hideouts for compensation or just out of sentiment for the Tehreek (the resistance). The army was viscerally abhorred; the soldiers were seen as a brute occupying force that did not hesitate to go on a rampage, ransacking homes and beating people. They were not only after militants; they were vengeful toward the civilians as well.

Fateh Jaan's house stood by the road, where the soldiers parked their vehicles. During searches, her home unfortunately would be turned into a makeshift interrogation center. Fateh shivered at the memory of the cries of men and the wounded they retrieved in the aftermath. When Naseeb was taken this last time, Fateh thought it was the routine *pooch taach*

(questioning). After previous detentions, Naseeb returned badly beaten, barely alive. Fateh readied herself yet again to nurse Naseeb back to health. She knew he would be tortured despite his noninvolvement with militancy. It would take days for him to recover, and the family would fall on hard times. Fateh had already taken to doing small jobs in the neighborhood to make ends meet. But many weeks passed, and Naseeb was still in custody. Fateh began the excruciating routine that countless families undertake when a person is detained and untraced. Accompanied by a few elderly neighbors and her brothers, Fateh went to the army camps. The officials denied that any arrests had been made in the area on that day. The local police station did not accept her FIR, which was not unusual. They suggested she go back to the army camp. The camp officers refused to give her any information and sent her back to the police. Utterly defeated, Fateh returned home.

Nights had always been challenging in the village. The soldiers would come knocking, demanding tea or a room to rest in. Over the years Fateh's entire family had made a routine of spending nights in the safety of another home. "The soldiers would be drunk and belligerent," Fateh said. "They would swear at us. They would barge inside and keep us under siege; those moments were hell." She believed that the soldiers had ulterior motives, that asking for tea or resting space was just a *bahana* (pretense). They would ogle her and ask for Rubina, Fateh's teenaged daughter, which the family thought was suspicious and invoked fear in them. Gradually, fatigue set in, and the family decided that only Rubina would shift elsewhere for the night; they feared for her the most. "We did not fear death," Fateh said. "Over the years, we saw so many dying; we lost that fear. Saving Rubina's honor was our main worry."

The first night of Naseeb's arrest passed in vigil with a few family and friends, Fateh recalled. She mistook every creak for either Naseeb returning or the soldiers. At dawn, they all left for the police station, where Fateh's complaint was rejected. She was forced to go back to the army camp where, instead of getting any information, Fateh's brother was detained as well. After his release a week later, the family learned that his arm had been broken beyond repair during his interrogation. He never regained the use of

that arm, and over the years, increasingly unable to work, Fateh's brother became financially destitute. The officer at the police station seemed to act sympathetically, Fateh said. He told her: "Do not budge from the gate, and try to talk to whoever enters or leaves the camp, especially the officers. Take all your kids with you; show them your husband is a poor man with many mouths to feed; they might take mercy. If they do nothing, ask them for some *parchi* , then come again; I might get some help." Fateh scoffed at the memory:

That was mere playacting. That police- *walla* [cop] had ulterior motives; he pretended to be concerned about my children. He said he would provide money for food and books. The army- *wallas* [soldiers] tried the same. Some pretended they could get Naseeb released, and then they would show up at night; why did they need to come in the night? They would hang around, demand tea, asking where my daughter was. I got in their faces and would shout at them. I was at the end of my tether; I did not even fear for my life, but fearing worse, my brothers again advised that with Naseeb gone, we not stay at the house during the nights. The soldiers were angry that I had filed a case in the high court. Their officer came to give me money, saying I would get nothing from the court, but he would help me.

Not staying in their own home during the nights became a source of harassment for Fateh. The soldiers began alleging that Naseeb was a militant in hiding and not disappeared as Fateh claimed, and that she went to meet him at night. "You do go to meet him in the night, don't you?" they said, passing innuendos. "You should come to us too in the night; you make us walk this far for nothing." As her family and friends went on with their lives, Fateh continued the search for Naseeb by herself. Gradually, Naseeb passed into lore as the *geab gomut* [disappeared]—one more name in the litany of names whose death and disappearance stood unquestioned in more ways than one.

Ever since Naseeb's disappearance, Fateh said, she wakes up with a strange dread: "My eyes open, and I find myself drenched in sweat. Every sound makes me squirm. I feel as if people are bringing his dead body, or sometimes I think it might be him." Fateh raised her children on the hope that Naseeb is alive. Zaina often dreams of her father coming back, even though she was an infant when he was disappeared. Fateh takes these

dreams seriously. After every such dream, she visits Baba, who often asks her to offer *taherr* —an offering of rice cooked with turmeric and fried onions, sprinkled with salt. Besides being a form of a savory rice meal, the lore around why it is made yellow is deeply poignant. People say in old times during harsh and long snowy Himalayan winters the birds would find nothing to eat. The Kashmiris would cook rice with turmeric and spread it for them. The yellow color would make it easy for the birds to find the food on the snow-covered landscape. The dish became a choice offering that Kashmiris often make, and Fateh followed this tradition with great devotion. She believed that charity in the name of Allah was one of the most important Islamic ideals. “Khairatas che par asaan [charity has wings],” she said, meaning that doing charity alleviates one’s deeds and lifts bad luck.

At times, Fateh brooded over the fact that Naseeb might be dead. “Would he not try to reach out to his children even once if he was alive somewhere?” she questioned no one in particular. “He loved Zaina so much; he would hold her in his lap as if she was his first-born. How could he live without knowing what was happening to his children? He was a loving man; he could never go away without letting his children know he was alive.” Fateh’s dilemmas often became long monologues. Whoever sat nearby had nothing to offer except an ear and a wry smile that had nothing to do with happiness. In the initial years, Fateh kept up her struggle to find Naseeb on all fronts. She opened a file at every government office that allowed her complaint. She filed a case in the high court and with the SHRC, where she received a favorable judgment as far as proving the disappearance in custody was concerned. She became an activist with the APDP. Year after year, as Naseeb’s file grew with more documents, both useless and relevant, her challenges also mounted. Fateh was on the brink of financial destitution, and consequently Hanief and Rubina stopped going to school and began working as laborers.

Hanief, often unable to find a job, returned home despondent and angry. He became listless and got into fights. Rubina tried to find work nearby because she was responsible for watching her siblings when Fateh was out

doing chores in people's homes and on farms. The younger children attended a public school, but without proper nourishment and clothes, Fateh found it hard to keep them motivated. Her meager income was not enough even for basic necessities. At one level she felt vindicated that she was able to pursue Naseeb's case in the court and administrative offices; on another, however, her family was suffering. In a fit of desperation, one year Fateh applied for the government's social welfare plan for widows. Being a half-widow, whose husband was disappeared and not "dead," she found out she was not eligible. Half-widows occupy a no-man's-land—or rather, a no-woman's-land. Amid the world of disappearance, the possibility of the husband being alive, languishing in an unknown jail, is as possible as him being interred in an unidentified grave or worse, his body thrown into a river or jungle. Like many half-widows, Fateh did not have the luxury of having a dead body or the privilege of knowing the address of the jail where her husband might be incarcerated. Thus the imaginaries of half-widows are constantly on the run between an unceasing Safa and Marwa, between what the need of the moment might be, a hungry child or yearning for the person to return, immediate monetary relief or justice.¹⁹

To be eligible for the welfare plan, Fateh needed to become a "full" widow, which meant that she had to contradict Naseeb's disappeared status and give him up for dead. What would happen when she agreed to him being dead? Would she have to give up fighting against his disappearance and hoping that he was still alive somewhere? Per Indian statutes applicable to Kashmir, any married man disappeared for seven years or more can be officially considered dead. But for most half-widows, like Fateh, a death certificate runs counter to their struggle to find their men alive. Many times I explained to Fateh that if she got the certificate, it did not mean the annulment of her legal fight, but it was an uncharted terrain, and there was little precedence in such cases. A few half-widows who had procured death certificates to get financial assistance from the government as widows also had cases in courts and the SHRC. As one half-widow put it: "There is nothing happening anywhere. All of this is a bunch of papers; we pick up a sheaf from one desk and put it on the other, and we repeat the process and

have been doing so for many long years. The only different thing would be my husband returning, and it has not happened so far, so if my case is under appeal in court or at the office where we can get the death certificate, it hardly matters.”

There is little precedence for half-widows seeking welfare from the government, mostly because there is a long drawn-out process, and proving the innocence of the disappeared—that he was not involved with militant activities—is also a factor. In addition, the welfare amount for a widow is quite paltry. Many routine widows in Kashmir (not just the half-widows) feel the effort to procure a welfare check incurs more costs than it yields each month. More important, the women whose husbands were militants will not approach the authorities for support. In Fateh’s case she applied for welfare after many months of emotional wrangling. After two years of intense back and forth with the clerks and the officers over every little document, tiny bribes, endless referrals, and recommendations, Fateh obtained Naseeb’s death certificate, making her eligible for a minuscule remuneration.

After she received the document, Fateh pondered in despair: “I do not know whether to feel good at getting the certificate or mourn Naseeb’s *kagzi mauth* [paper death]. Am I a widow now; will the stipend take my pain away? Should I believe that Naseeb isn’t alive now? But I never saw his dead body; how does this paper change anything?” She assured herself by saying, “What will a document do? It does not mean he is dead; it is only to help us. If he comes to know we got his death certificate, I know he will understand it is for the good of the children and that I did not give up on searching for him.” Her own assurance would not comfort her for long, and she lamented: “I seem to have sold my husband for some measly amount that won’t even buy us food for a week.” Fateh’s guilt about acquiring the death certificate increased; she felt she had betrayed him. “What could I do? I know I opened my palms before the same authorities that disappeared my husband.” Fateh’s open-palm metaphor alluded to an act akin to begging.

Some years earlier, at her family’s insistence, Fateh had also applied for the ex gratia relief program. The Kashmir government has instituted this

program for families whose kin is a victim of killing or disappearance by the army in militancy-related violence. For compensation, it first needed to be proven that the victim was not linked to militancy. Fateh had abandoned the case, because the process involved massive paperwork to be processed in various offices. She did not have the time or the money to go to the city and pursue the cases. Moving documents from office to office often entailed paying bribes to clerks and officers. Fateh felt guilty about applying for the welfare program, saying, “I did not want to sell Naseeb for money; I want justice.” In the end, she gave up looking for welfare, and she also abandoned the court cases, because she did not have the kind of time and money required, and because she faced massive red tape.

The Hurriyet Conference had filed the court case on behalf of Fateh Jaan. She told me she was biding her time and believed that once her son started to earn, she would pursue the cases again. She was skeptical of getting justice, however. Regarding the case Fateh had filed with the SHRC against the army regiment that had arrested Naseeb, even though she won a favorable judgment, the case had stretched for years. She had faced brutal cross-examination by the army’s defense. “I stood by my words,” Fateh recalled, “even when they tried to force me into saying incorrect things.” Despite receiving direct and covert threats from the army to take back her case, as a star witness, Fateh did not recant her statement against the army officer in charge nor the army regiment. The SHRC judgment confirmed that Naseeb had indeed been picked up by the Indian “security forces,” an oxymoronic term in the context of the fatalities caused by them. Kashmiris point this out and call them “insecurity forces.” The SHRC statement in Fateh’s case, borrowing from a Supreme Court judgment, stated in a discreet way that the court was “mindful of what is frequently happening during these days. Persons are kidnapped in the sight of others and forcibly taken out of sight of all others and later kidnapped or killed.”²⁰

Nevertheless, on the question of punishment for the army men who had arrested Naseeb, the SHRC remained silent, save for some mild chastising and tracing the impunity indirectly through the Supreme Court judgment. However, it did refer to the army’s behavior as tantamount to a “cover-up”

to justify the disappearance. The SHRC recommended the rehabilitation of Fateh Jaan. This judgment came in 2008, but Fateh Jaan never received any compensation or any other form of relief, nor was she interested in receiving any. Her case ended up as another statistic emphasizing that human rights abuses began and ended as a matter of policy in the counterinsurgency, and the authorities did nothing to bring the army to justice. After the SHRC judgment, the army through police and informers tried to engage Fateh in covert negotiations to give up her court case, which she was anyway slow to follow up on due to financial constraints. The army tried to force her to accept monetary compensation and withdraw the case, which languished in the court. Over the years Fateh Jaan has never withdrawn the case but has stopped pursuing it for lack of time and money.

After obtaining the death certificate, Fateh fell into a major depressive episode. I visited her in the early winter of 2012, and a sixteen-year record-breaking cold was descending on Kashmir. Fateh's house was chilly. In summer the entire family had pitched in to layer the ceiling with mud to create insulation, which obviously had not worked. The ceiling was flaking and a cold wave crept into the house. Fateh lay in a ragged quilt, shivering and mumbling: "Naseeb will not come now. He was killed twice—first by the soldiers, now by the paper [death certificate]. But tell me, is there any other way? The kids will have to stop school if we do not get some help." Even though she was ill, she did not stay home for long. "I have to work, I don't have the luxury to fall sick," she said. Fateh returned to work by midsummer and resumed her visits to the mystic-seer, who assured her that all would be well.

The *pir* divined that Naseeb probably was alive, but in a dark pit-like room, and his skin was sallow. Fateh and the children talked about it; the younger daughter tried to identify the place the seer had indicated. Hanief, in typical adolescent smugness, said: "All jail cells are dark. That is it. I got it; he is in a jail." After a while, Fateh turned to me and whispered: "It could be a grave, but then, he said his coloring is sallow. If it was a corpse he saw, it would have no skin by now, am I right?" I nodded. Fateh was visiting the seer again in the coming week. At the mystic's behest—on June

11, 2012, the tenth anniversary of Naseeb's disappearance—Fateh cooked *taherr*, the offering of yellow rice, sometimes mixed with mutton or chicken in well-off households. It was to be an obeisance for Naseeb's safe return—some day. Since it was a milestone year, the *pir* had asked Fateh to add a whole chicken to the rice and distribute it to the needy. Fateh joked: "The best is to eat it ourselves; who is needier than us?" She had finally stopped pursuing the welfare program application because it required more paperwork to actually start the payments. Fateh called the entire process *bey-raham* (merciless) and said: "We do not need relief; we want justice." By this time, Parveena Ahangar's APDP had also begun a small program, giving deserving activists basic groceries for the month—a great support to Fateh. Expanding their rehabilitation programs for the members despite scarcity of funds is a continued pursuit with the APDP groups.

After the *taherr* was ready, Fateh called the children to distribute it to the neighbors and passersby. Hanief talked about what they would do "when Papa returns" while prying out Naseeb's death certificate from the plank in the ceiling to show me. Soon all the children gathered around to see *Papa ki certificate* (Father's certificate). They touched the pale sheet of paper gingerly, running their fingers over the Government of Jammu and Kashmir insignia with *certificate-e-maut* (death certificate) emblazoned on the top—the two words an awkward amalgam of English and Urdu. The last remaining plate of yellow rice sat in front of us. Fateh urged me to eat and take some home. The thin line separating the real and the false seemed blurry as Fateh put a fistful in a tiny plastic bag and shoved it into my bag.

All I could hear were Fateh's loud supplications for Naseeb's return, while she chided the children to put back the death certificate safely and make sure they had distributed the remaining *taherr* to people outside. Naseeb's death certificate was returned to the same file with the documents pertaining to his disappearance. In the end it seemed the *kagzaat* amounted to nothing and everything. As everything, the documents are almost a protracted engagement, a kind of "gap-filling." The disappeared—how to mourn them, remember them? There is no precedent for having a disappearance; dealing with such an event becomes a complex series of

engagements, and it seems these processes become a part of alternate forms of mourning. As nothing, the documents fail even at the basics of acquiring any form of relief or justice. Thus the archive becomes a site of preservation of a traumatic history, which becomes an important part of people's lives, especially within the gendered politics of mourning. The archival repertoire becomes part of the everyday performance, a way of living. The disappeared are assimilated into life, embodied as a haunting, a knock about to come, a reverse pregnancy, or what is at the heart of this chapter—an archival impulse. The archival impulse becomes part of a discursive performance to make manifest resistance against the injustice of disappearances under a military occupation.



the blood-soaked rags
drying in Dilli and Lahore
are fresh in Lal Chowk—

here,
the slaughterhouse is open—
Kashmiri bodies hung
on hooks blinded eyes,
tender tongued radical
meat branded *azadi*
is the venison of nations
hungry

CHAPTER 7

THE CONVERGENCE OF GRIEF AND JOY

In a time of unspeakable violence such as in Kashmir, the spaces for memory are constricted. The essential question is not only how memory *becomes* in times of oppression and war but also what becomes of memory? This chapter probes not only how memory is produced under repressive policies but how it remains and informs, and importantly what forms it takes. Two juxtaposed scenarios—one of a wedding and the other of the public protest—illustrate how the social repertoire sustains under military occupation that is bent on erasure. These two events manifest the obliteration and transmutation as well as the blurring between grief and joy that has occurred in Kashmiri people's commemorative social expressions. The events discussed in this chapter illustrate how most of the everyday social facts and spaces have transmuted and morphed, memorializing repertoire and how it recuperates memory in times of loss and repression.

THE REPERTOIRE OF MEMORY-MAKING

In 2012, Saja, a seventy-eight-year-old veteran APDP activist, invited me to the joint wedding of her two granddaughters. She gave me the invitation during an APDP protest, sitting huddled, knees close to her chest, her bright green eyes staring intently at my face. A witty woman, Saja often made lighthearted jokes. She possessed an impish smile, but the pain of decades was unmistakable on her deeply lined face, resembling a sepia-toned map of a forgotten country. Saja had lost four sons. Sameer, the youngest, had been forcibly disappeared by the army. The two oldest sons had been

militants, allegedly killed in encounters. The fourth son had been killed in custody after being picked up by the army.

Saja held my hand tightly and insisted that I participate in the wedding celebrations, and I promised her I would attend. A week later, I was in a vehicle speeding toward Saja's home in one of the most remote villages of Bandpur district, accompanying Parveena Ahangar and a few other APDP activists. Saja's village is located a half-day's journey from Srinagar. For someone of Saja's age, the trip must be uncomfortable, not only because of the distance but the utter inconvenience of having to change several buses to reach the city. We sped by the countryside, its sheer beauty gurgling like a child's giggle amid a funeral—the dissonance was evident. Despite the natural beauty, there were constant reminders of the perpetual war prevalent in the region. The mountains were dotted with bunkers keeping a watch on barren stretches of land, deserted roadsides, and hillside terraces lush with paddies, flocks of lazy herds, sleepy hamlets, forgotten trails, and highways. Daffodils, wild mint, and mustard enhanced the scenery, and an occasional patch of wild hemp peeped out amid the bushes.

Tall colonnades of poplars on the highway were interwoven with concertina wires, which ran across and through the roads to create checkpoints for pedestrians, livestock, and traffic. People had to negotiate the craggy wire barricades obstructing the roads and alleys. There was a slight drizzle, and the soldiers had taken refuge under the sopping wet foliage. The poplar trees and the streetlights were marked by strokes of orange, green, and white—the tricolors of the Indian flag. The army had put up huge cloth banners and billboards for the traffic, especially their own vehicles, directing: Slow Down, Convoy Approaching—with regards from 77 RR. The army billboards dotting the serene country roads declared: Awam aur Jawan: Aman Ke Naam [the civilian and The soldier: dedicated to peace]. These banners named various programs that the army conducted with the youth through Operation Goodwill.

My car-mates scoffed at the banners. One of them repeated a famous couplet—"See, my murderer has become my defendant"—thus summing up the situation. The mountainsides had the name "India" etched on them to be

visible from a distance, as were the names of the army regiments posted in the area. One of my companions observed: “They mark everything, as if we need reminding they are here. They want to put an Indian stamp on everything and erase everything Kashmiri.” The politics of erasure, stark in enforced disappearances, seemed under way in other physical aspects of the region. The constant engineering of consent to limit the Kashmiri imagination and make the idea of India a norm for the denizens is apparent. The hypervisibility of nationalistic symbols of India is a mode of silencing Kashmiris.

As we passed a notorious army camp, Parveena and others recounted their past hostile encounters with the soldiers. This camp was situated on a steep hillside, and the only structure visible from the road was its high wall. Outside stood a slim brick lookout and a stodgy bunker covered with wire mesh and a huge welcome banner. “See, a welcome. Big deal. ‘Welcome’ comes with either a bullet or a beating and a free side of humiliation,” said the driver, with an edge in his voice.¹ The entire length of the camp was covered with multiple layers of concertina wire. Empty bottles of liquor hung from the high wire fences like necklaces, probably used as makeshift alarms in case of intrusion. Emblazed on the fortified walls that faced the road were pictures of Kashmir’s well-known lakes, mountains, glaciers, and gardens. It was the same type of makeover given to the army camp in Varmul that I had observed while traveling with Sadaf (chapter 4). The contrasting sight of the welcome banner and idyllic pictures and the inherent hostility of the military and its camps, of pretense and piety, seemed telling of the kind of visibility the government seeks for its military—that is, to project it as a benign institution, as part of the winning of hearts and minds, also known as “heart warfare” (Bhan 2013: 134). It seemed that there could be no sight more awkward than a notorious army camp decked with touristy pictures. The group in the car categorized the entire mise-en-scène as *makarel*. Shabir (see chapter 5) had also used this word in describing the behavior of the army in the context of Operation Goodwill. A *makar* is a hypocrite, someone who uses sly tactics for a specific covert agenda. A *makar* is said to engage in *makarel*, a sort of repertoire or

playacting without appearing confrontational or adversarial while peddling a selfish agenda.

Parveena reminisced: “They have stopped me here many times, at the height of militancy, when I went to Saja’s house with a documentary filmmaker. I hid the camera in a vegetable basket. They took us for questioning. It was hard, they did not let a fly get through easily. I exchanged heated words with them; they were so rude.”² After stopping our car, soldiers checked the vehicle, rummaging through our bags and gifts of fruits that we carried. They poked every surface with batons and the barrels of their guns. They questioned us about where we were headed. They mistook me for a tourist when I said I lived in America. “Amrika,” the soldier repeated in Hindi, “Accha farinarr hain [I see, you are a foreigner].” He seemed unimpressed as he cursorily glanced over the identity cards that our driver and the other male companions were asked to produce. Parveena was not asked for her identity card, nor did she carry one. I seemed beyond any stricture: being from “Amrika,” I was dismissively directed: “Get in the car, madam.” Incidentally, all visitors from “outside,” especially tourists, are not asked for identity cards. My perceived status as a tourist had transcended the constraints of surveillance routinely enforced on native Kashmiris.

It began to rain. After a few hours of tiring travel through checkpoints and delays caused by army convoys, we reached Saja’s one-story home where her three other surviving sons also lived. Saja occupied one room separately with Heena, her disappeared son Sameer’s eldest thirteen-year-old daughter, whom she was raising. Heena’s mother had returned to her parents, and in a rare instance for a half-widow, she had remarried and was raising her other three children with her new husband. Saja and her extended family came out to welcome us. They swarmed around Parveena, hugging and kissing her, their love for her palpable. The brides, Saja’s eldest son’s daughters, made a beautiful sight. They wore inexpensive finery: pink and red dresses and costume jewelry. They were a radiant contradiction to the spartan surroundings. They sat in a traditionally decorated corner of the room on a padded mattress, covered with a clean but well-worn sheet. On the wall behind hung a tapestry, which they

themselves had embroidered. The guests sat on a rough weed mat (called *waguw*), wet with the slush everyone had dragged in from the rain. Saja sat huddled in the middle, her hands hugging her knees, reminiscent of the way she had sat at the protest.

The room was bursting at the seams with women of all ages, excited little boys, and flustered toddlers nursing at their mothers' breasts. Interestingly, the tiniest old man, his face deeply wrinkled, who could be considered beyond any gender, stood at the window peeping in; I could almost feel his legs tottering. This I recall not for anything else but the sheer innocence of his curious face watching the room filling with guests from the city. Behind him stood a makeshift hearth on which the wedding feast was being cooked. In a frenzy, men put together a tarpaulin canopy to protect the hearth from the rain.

The women inside the room sat packed together on the damp floor. We were given a seat of honor near the brides. Parveena sat closest to them, perched uncomfortably between the damp mat and the raised mattress, but she did not seem to mind. The women were throatily engaged in *wanwun* —a name given to a repertoire of traditional wedding songs. There are always mild changes in the lyrics from region to region, depending on vernacular peculiarities. The songs initially sung are spiritual invocations to Allah or the Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, and others in honor of local saints, invoking their blessings. The main songs of *wanwun* are often based on simple themes of domesticity, and long-tested themes of love and romance also dominate. There are comical songs, which poke fun at the bride, the groom, or their families, and others pivot around the lavishness of the wedding festivities or the lack thereof.

Many classic *wanwun* songs are folkloric and cannot be traced to any particular poet; others are based on classic poems that have been adapted into popular lyrical format, albeit with rhythmic variations or substitute words. Habbeh Khotoon's songs are very popular and sung in different versions. It is traditional for women to improvise old classic poems; most notably, they come up with impromptu, whimsical renditions tailoring the songs to the occasion. The songs of *wanwun* are dominantly dialogic and

constantly improvised. Once a version becomes popular, professional wedding singers will improvise them further to suit different occasions. After the new renditions segue into the mainstream repertoire, a new version might evolve, and as such, no one gets credited for the lyrics.

The women in the room were singing and laughing raucously. Now that we had arrived, they began preparing for another session of singing and dancing. A tiny, delicate woman named Jamila, wearing a sweat-soaked blue *shalwar kameez* , stood up. The crowd moved to create a small circular spot for her to stand. Jamila arranged her gauzy scarf, making sure it was securely covering her hair and bosom, then she started to twirl expertly on her toes. Parveena accepted a *tumbhaknaari* , a long-necked terracotta drum covered on the bottom with animal skin, which she held in the crook of her arm, as her fingertips tapped the hide, picking up the rhythm. An old lady held the *nout* , a simple earthen pot, beating it with her ringed finger and a copper spoon. Heena, who sat close to Saja, played the *chumta* , large iron tongs with rings.

Jamila raised her right hand over her head and began circling as she displayed some intricate footwork. She quickened her steps with the rising music, reminding me of a whirling dervish, her face lush with sheer joy and abandonment. This dance by women is not easily visible at Kashmiri functions, except at private, often gender-segregated, marriage soirees. Most dancing in a Kashmiri wedding is the forte of *bach-kot* , usually a male dancer in drag. However, the *wanwun* is the forte of women as *zananegyawun* (women's songs). It has a set method for singing. There are usually two groups of women engaged in a lyrical repartee, or there can be a lead singer and a chorus. One group or the lead singer initiates a verse called *wanun* (saying), which is repeated by the other group called *ratun* (receiving). In between this sending and receiving of lyrics, the groups pause and make a peculiar *Ahnn* sound—understood as the cue to respond or at times used to improvise the words if need be. After this guttural pause, the other group does the *ratun* and a similar cyclical process follows until the song is completed.

At this soirée Jamila was the lead singer. Her voice was steady and attractive. The raspiness suggested she had been singing for a long time but she seemed indefatigable. The following is a sampling in translation of the song she led:

We used to go to college,
We used to look good together, the two of us
We were separated; me and my beloved
We began fighting; me and my beloved

The gathering had been singing through the whole night and had exhausted most of their favorite songs. I saw Heena nudging Saja, who leaned toward me and said that Heena wanted *Papa-en baeth*, “her Papa’s songs.” I did not understand what that meant. As Saja addressed Jamila, I did not catch what was said. Jamila glanced at Heena and smiled. After a pause, she began a long lyrical wail: “Waaaaay, wayyyyhh.” The other ladies including Parveena joined her: “Waaaaay, wayyyyhh.” This wail is a customary lyrical expression of pain often used in eulogies or melancholy songs. The haunting sound threw me off balance. I was not ready to listen to anything that sounded less than rapturous. Jamila went on for a minute or more, wailing and whirling faster as the women quickened their hands on the instruments.

Jamila had begun to sing *Mujahid-baet*, which loosely translates to “songs of/for the strivers/militants.” These are songs commemorating the martyrdom of Mujahids who died fighting the Indian army. Heena’s father, Rafiq, a noncombatant, was forcibly disappeared in the custody of the Indian army. All those killed or disappeared by the Indian army even if noncombatants are commemorated as having sacrificed their lives for Kashmir’s struggle. They are given the status of martyrs or de facto Mujahids. This manifest gesture illuminates how Kashmiris collectively and individually perceive their political relation with the Indian military occupation. Heena considered these songs to commemorate her father, thus she called them “Papa’s songs.” Reinvigorated, she clanged the *chumta* faster against the copper pot, her face shining. She moved closer to her

grandmother, who winced as if hurt but hugged her close. An old woman in the corner, who had been pouring pink *nun-chai* from a copper samovar, joined the orchestra by beating the hot vessel with a steel ladle.³

Jamila's scarf fell under her feet, but she continued to dance. She seemed to have forgotten the strict decorum of covering her bosom and hair. She initiated the first verse: "My beloved, my beloved, my ruthless beloved." The chorus repeated the lines: "Come to me in the flower garden, my love." Again, Jamila: "The Indian armed forces have come to raid." And then: "The Indian armed forces have raided Andra-gam [name of a village]." The chorus repeated twice, after which Jamila stopped for a brief moment, her eyes resting on Saja and Heena. She then sang at the top of her voice, raspy but steady: "Poor Rafiq-jan has been disappeared."⁴

Saja sat quietly, her tiny frame huddled even tighter. Heena joined the chorus with gusto, her face glistening with sweat. The chorus continued: "My beloved, my beloved, my ruthless beloved/Come to me in the flower garden, my love." Jamila paused then wailed: "There has been a raid [by the Indian armed forces] / The Indian armed forces have raided Bon-pora [name of a village]." The chorus repeated twice. Jamila paused, continuing to twirl, and sang in a high pitch: "Poor Uncle-'laleh' has been disappeared."⁵ When the chorus repeated, Jamila whirled faster, becoming a blur. The chorus continued: "My beloved, my beloved, my ruthless beloved, come to me in the flower garden, my love."

The song stretched to more than a half-hour, filling with names of those who had been disappeared or killed by the Indian forces. Although the space in the room did not allow more than one person to stand, two young girls got up and joined Jamila in dancing. One had lost her voice, probably from the preceding night of *wanwun*, but she led in calling out the names of several men together in one verse, her eyes shining, her pitch impassioned. Saja turned to me, whispering amid the music: "These two girls will go crazy; they have been singing *Mujahid-baet* all night. The tall one, her brother, fiancée, and maternal uncle were all killed by the army. Yemeh che phatnass amtchi, zaneh chukh anderr naar [The girls are on the brink of explosion, they have fire (inside)]."

As the song continued, a woman entered the room and asked, “Hey salamun naaw wunnwye? [Did you mention Salam’s name?]” Salam, I came to know, was her cousin, who had been killed by the army. Her sudden entry, as she left soon after, had been only to remind the others to mention her cousin’s name in the song. The women added expository lyrics, which could have been directly relevant to the person being remembered or just an interesting metaphorical addition. They imagined scenarios of death, of waiting, or “of still being somewhere”; there were also subtle jabs at the Indian state, army, police, and state administration, as well as those who were perceived as being responsible for the atrocities against these men.

Jamila added a line that jabbed at Kashmir’s bureaucracy: “Tcha chukh afsar tche be karthass mara-ho [You are an officer; you made me miserable].” The word she used for “making miserable” is in fact the word for being/ getting killed in Kashmiri. Another verse extolled the man who was martyred, mentioning him as a noble father of “many daughters,” who were waiting with “hennaed” palms. In other words he had daughters of marriageable age, now facing an uncertain future without their father’s succor and his physical protection. Another song was sung from the perspective of a wife who had been left alone in a hostile world while her husband had proceeded to a better state in *jannat* (heaven) by dying a martyr’s death. The sentiment in this song was that the man had “given up” his life voluntarily for the nation, and his death was an offering, even though many of the noncombatants recalled had been killed in involuntary situations.

During a pause Parveena added a few names and sang throatily, wiping her tears. Saja came closer to her and they hugged. Parveena leaned toward me and said: “I mentioned my *nika* [referring to her son as her little boy] and Mogal’s Nazir. I have promised her I will mention his name always, whenever and wherever I can.” The women sang in chorus after her: “I will keep calling you, I will keep calling you.”

THE LABOR OF MEMORY

The air in the room became thick with memory. Most eyes were dry and the voices steady. The song stretched out as the women called many more names culled from pasts made hazy by time. They seemed intent to pry out every name, patting their foreheads, elbowing each other's bellies to recall forgotten names. This labor of memory felt like the lifting of mosses and dirt to reveal names on old tombstones. The gaiety that typically surrounds a wedding gave way to something laden and heavy. Young children looked expectantly at the faces of their elders and accompanied them in calling out names. As the *Mujahid baeth* were being sung, the hennaed hands of the brides were also being admired. The brides sang with vigor: "I will keep calling you, I will keep calling you."

The work of memory inside the room was in stark contrast to the silence imposed on memorialization by the military occupation. Government censors all free expression, especially the stories of human rights violations, of killings and disappearances, of the political will of the people for independence and self-determination. A journalist who writes poetry told me it was easier to hide in poetry what could not be mentioned in the news he reported. A 2012 incident regarding a children's Urdu alphabet book provides an example of how pervasive the censorship is. The book showed several images in relation to the letter *Zoi*. Among *zaroof* (utensils), *zahir* (visible), and *zarf* (ornamental cup holder) was the word *zaalim* (tyrant) attached to the image of what closely resembled a policeman. The government cracked down heavily on the author and took the book out of circulation (Vij 2011b).

The level of surveillance on what is communicated by Kashmiri writers, activists, and average regular social media users to the outside world is so high that since 2016, the Internet across the Kashmir Valley has been suspended more than thirty times. Twitter had sent notices to Kashmiri users explaining that the Indian government had reported certain tweets and Twitter accounts for violating Section India's Information Technology Act. This act allows the government to censor online content if it believes the expressions pose a threat to security, sovereignty, integrity, or defense (Manve 2017). Kashmiri social media users are often banned from Face-

book. I have personal experience of this, with both Facebook and Twitter (Angwin and Grassegger 2017).

Such is the level of surveillance as far as writing about Kashmir is concerned, that even I have been listed among “secessionist writers” (Qadri 2017)—whatever the term might mean. While a government official in Kashmir explained that the list was an exercise to create a database, and the word “secessionist” was a “clerical mistake,” it is telling of the panopticonic gaze that authorities have on anyone challenging the Indian narrative on Kashmir and supporting people’s genuine political demand. Censorship in Kashmir has been a historical reality, and repression of explicit expression has touched new levels today. The government enforces a silence, which can manifest as blatant censorship or penalization of any pro-resistance narrative, symbol, or event. The normal routines for how people commemorate and remember their dead—those killed in the government retaliation— have become impossible. In the case of disappearances, the entire idea of a “good” disappearance for the government is to disappear “without a trace”; yet memory gushes out from the unlikeliest of places.

At the wedding at Saja’s house it seemed that the cultural memory won over the “official” history. A strange juxtaposition of grief and joy appeared. It is often that the appearance of grief makes joy invisible, and vice versa, but at that moment I saw them forced together, transmuting into each other. That the disappeared and the killed were making their presence felt was also a cause for euphoria—that they are not forgotten. With the brides singing a funerary song, the wedding became a space of mourning and of remembrance, telling, retelling: a politics of mourning in which grief and joy were conjoined. The retelling became a subtle subversion in the innards of a deep social space away from the military panopticon. Even if surveillance and self-surveillance were rampant outside the room, in these moments under the mask of a wedding, memory not only became visible but was transmitted to the younger generations. Absorbing it wide-eyed, they listened and sang along. The men disappeared and killed became invincible mythical figures, who had once been part of the social and

political firmament fighting for the cause of self-determination and independence. Although criminalized by India, the cause is held as a just and rightful war by the majority of Kashmiri masses.

As the wedding *wanwun* progressed, an invocation to Allah was interspersed with prayers for Kashmir's freedom from India. The women sang many songs extolling early freedom fighters (most of them deceased), calling them by name and narrating the scenarios of their valiant fight with the army. This set of songs provided the contextual history of those dead and disappeared. Thus the wedding soiree became a private history lesson away from the formal spaces of schools, where Indian curriculum dominates learning and knowledge of Kashmiri history is almost nonexistent. There is a huge chasm between what is formally taught to children, what appears in media, and what people can express publicly. In the end what happens in the privacy of homes and the events on the street dictates the perception of Kashmiri children. Given the ubiquity of the slogan that rents Kashmiri air—"Hum kya chahte [What do we want?]"—which is responded with "Azadi!" (independence/freedom), Kashmiri children might be unique in demanding *azadi* to the question of what do you want (rather than asking for candy or toys). In the small, overheated room at Saja's place, in that moment, resistance manifested bare bones as memory versus forgetting in the young, old, and middle-aged.

While the government can restrict and censor the written word, the wedding, which was not a formal "state-public" space, allowed for an intense commemoration. The songs of *wanwun* during weddings, the words of dirges at funerals—spaces that largely belong to women—are lent to memory-making. It becomes what Julia Kristeva (1979) has called women's monumental time, which the women seize for making countermemory. The import of women's memorialization is a challenge to the established practices of remembering and forgetting. Memory in Kashmir dwells between military repression and private reiterations. It remains hidden in markers. While women use the archive and the repertoire to memorialize, the nonhegemonic masculine attitude in Kashmir also paves unique ways to capture memory. Masculine attempts at memorialization are found on

roadsides, in the tightest of alleys, in the strangest of places. You will not find such commemorative installations unless you look deliberately. It takes effort to crane your neck to discern that small signboard that springs up one day, naming a previously unnamed and unremarkable *chowk* (crossing) or a bus stop after a martyr. The object thus named can be as trivial as a public faucet, where the plaque is written in the smallest possible font, built hurriedly.

Such commemorative installations are deliberately not highlighted. No one may notice except those who knowingly seek it. It is an open secret. One must look too high on the street light to see the signboard pegged onto it, or read the fine print etched behind the faucet. These installations are remembrances and memories hidden in plain sight, made invisible, because memory in Kashmir also means putting away or hiding. The Kashmiri masculinity has emerged in the face of Indian militarization—an illustration of which emerges in the lives of Shabir, Jabbar, Raheem, Basit, and others who permeate the pages of this ethnography. The Kashmiri male thus looms between a patriarch and a feminized subject.

TRANSMUTATIONS

Sharifa's house stood in the midst of tight alleys in one of the humbler parts of the old city in Srinagar. The tight ramparts are often filled with the aroma of collard greens and onions being cooked, snatches of songs on the radio, and gurgling gutters, which although putrid, strangely seem in place with the centuries-old ambience. When her son, referred to as Munna at home, disappeared, Sharifa had been trying to arrange his marriage. "I thought I would be busy chasing grandchildren," she said, "and here I am chasing courts, police, army. . . . At this age, I am wandering on the roads looking for my son. Inside here [pointing to the room], my home is not a home anymore."

Sharifa and I arranged to go to a protest together. As we prepared to leave, she pulled her large plastic bag from behind a bolster, saying, "This needs to go with me." She gingerly cradled the bag in the nook of her arm

and bent uncomfortably to lock the door. I offered to hold the bag. She shook her head, tightening her arm a bit around it. "It is okay with me," she said. She was reluctant to hand the bag to me. The weathered wooden door to the home let out an ancient yelp as Sharifa cinched the iron crossbar into place. Her invalid husband was inside the house. Her married daughter would let herself in when she came to be with her father while Sharifa was away. Sharifa's husband had suffered a heart attack after their son was disappeared, and his health had deteriorated to the extent that he had lost the use of his legs.

We traveled to the protest venue in a noisy auto-rickshaw with the bag between us like a third passenger. Sharifa patted it as she pulled the bag to her side. "This should be with me," she said. "A lot of people interview us; we show them these; documents speak." We reached the park, where most of the APDP activists had gathered sitting in the shade of a few trees as the August sun glared. The fountains in the park were dry, and the grass withered in places. The women had water, children, and their document bags at their sides or in their laps. The park's metal fence was emblazoned with a giant plastic poster displaying an outline of a male face with side-parted hair. It was a featureless visage; in place of a nose or a mouth, it had the names of men who been disappeared. A giant rectangular poster made out of newspapers stood in the middle; the silhouette of a man, representing the disappeared, had been cut in the middle.

The APDP activists welcomed Sharifa with yelps of joy. Turning to me, she said: "We are each other's rocks; our Karbala is the same." "Karbala" is a reference to the battle that occurred in 680 AD in the city of modern Iraq by the same name in which the Prophet Mohammad's (peace be upon him) grandson and his family were martyred when facing the tyrannical ruler Yazid. Karbala, as a word in common usage in Kashmir invokes pain, pathos, speaking truth to power, and battle for justice. Following their usual pattern, the APDP activists fanned out as more members poured into the park. They sat in a semiplanned order holding photographs of their sons and husbands along with their document bags. Many children and grandchildren were present. The younger ones sat on laps, while the older ones sat

formally lined up with the adults. There were journalists interviewing some activists. A young activist, Rehana, whose father had been disappeared when she was thirteen, was now in her twenties and recently married; she was being interviewed. Parveena talked to the journalists while videographers followed the activities closely. There were researchers with notepads and cameras waiting to make contact with the activists. Jana, one activist with whom I worked closely, called out to me to translate for her. She was being interviewed by a Japanese journalist, who himself spoke little English.

A group of lawyers, human rights activists, and curious passersby stood around in solidarity. Nearby, local alert policemen kept their gaze averted and moped around the group with their guns and batons. Sharifa called out to one: “Come son, come, drink some water.” Turning to me, she justified her gesture. “He too is some mother’s son,” she said. “Woe is the fire in the belly. Otherwise, why would a Kashmiri son like him be my adversary?” In their life outside the job, the policemen, as Sharifa explained, are their “own”; it seemed she thought they become adversaries only during duty hours. Sharifa attributed a Kashmiri man working in the police force to survival rather loyalty to India.⁶

Soon Parveena rose up to give a speech. She wanted to use the bullhorn, but a staffer advised against it: “They [the police] will unnecessarily get irritated.” Parveena persisted in using it, however—a decision that other activists supported. The air began to echo with lamentations:

The light of my eyes, I will rock you.
My hermit-sage, I will rock you.
Son-stealer, may you turn to ash.
O Saint Dastgeer, I will rock you.⁷
O Dastgeer, turn son-stealers to ash.

All the women, including Sharifa, joined the chorus. Azi, another mother-activist, took the lead and improvised the lyrics:

My golden earring, I will rock you.
My Hamido, my Hamido, I will rock you.⁸

Son-stealer, may you turn to ash.

Saja, who had brought Heena to the protest, pushed her in front. “Who will care for her?” Saja wailed, sobbing uncontrollably, gasping for breath. Another mother, Rehat, fainted and several activists rushed to revive her. Photographers swooped down on the group, jostling for angles: close-ups, long shots, and weeping profiles of the women of the APDP. The wailing continued. A policeman approached to say that the activists must wrap up soon.

The afternoon sun ceaselessly beat down on the women, who continued to mourn. Sharifa led a new song, an improvisation on a popular wedding song. Buried in the lyrics was a direct barb against the enemy (the government) of those disappeared, who they referred to by a collective epithet of “my beloved bridegroom.” Use of the word “bridegroom” for the disappeared person is meant to reinforce the magnitude of the tragedy of those who had been killed in their prime. It is a paradoxical way of mourning the joyous possibilities of a life that has been snuffed out.

I will give you my life, my bridegroom.

I look for your shadow. I will give you my life, my bridegroom.

I will light up (*zool*) for the love I have for you.⁹

I feel you coming often. I will give you my life, my bridegroom.

May your enemies do *waay, waay*.¹⁰ I will give you my life, my bridegroom.

The bells on my hemline are tinkling. I will give you my life, my bridegroom.

The women sang about imaginary scenarios of weddings of the disappeared men who had been bachelors. A stray lyric was inserted to curse the “enemy,” who had “disappeared” them. The women invoked the names of a few men who had disappeared as they progressed with the song. The funereal atmosphere had a patina of forced levity as the women repeated the lyrics to a lighter tune. This scene was in juxtaposition to the

wedding at Saja's house, where the celebrations had turned funereal, but in the protest the weddings of the disappeared were being envisaged.

The sit-in broke soon after and the women dispersed and sat in smaller groups, as if in the courtyard of their homes, drinking water and eating fruit handed out by the APDP staffers. Most women in the group would never have thought of sitting like that in public, especially to mourn. The public space for Kashmiris, especially women, is maintaining an appearance of fortitude and patience. The public sphere is typically not a place for showing emotions of any kind, especially mourning. The forced and continuous mobility between public and private space, the difference between which has collapsed, has diffused gendered social constraints. Parveena once said to me, when I asked about protesting in public, that she had given up traditional conventions and even her burkha. Her son's disappearance had forced her to step out of the home and come into contact with what she had been shielded from by the men in her life—namely, what is perceived as a man's world of courts and police. After she had to deliberately initiate contact with *na-mahram* men from all walks of life, she felt keeping the motif of piety had become useless for her.¹¹

Parveena said: "I would have spent my life protected inside my home, but the pain of losing my son has dragged me on the street." Sharifa's narrative around her public activism resonated similarly: "I was very modest, my shame was hidden even from the sun or the moon, but my loss made the street into a home for me, and my home has become like an open pavement. Home is not a home. I want to sit on the street from where he [Munna] was taken, hoping he will appear just as suddenly as he was disappeared." Such sentiments were expressed by other APDP activists who saw the street harboring an endless possibility of the return of the disappeared.

The space of *gareh* (home) has undergone a change in meaning. "Home" was traditionally a revered space—private and secure which under a military occupation has lost its sanctity. Sometimes a home, like Fateh's in the mountains, can become a makeshift interrogation center, where men and women are tortured, killed, and raped. During cordon-and-search

operations, soldiers walk into the home with impunity and check each and every item. They ransack clothes and trivial household goods, open up ceilings and floorboards in their search for arms and militants. Often, the search is needless and done more to flaunt their power and present a threat. While the home has lost its privacy and sanctity, Sharifa evoked another scenario, where the difference between the two blurs. “We sit on the roads now, be it inside or outside,” she said. “We are frisked, questioned, and beaten everywhere; outside and inside seem to have no difference.” She gave examples of crackdowns, during which most males (excluding the elderly, preteens, and toddlers) are rounded up and detained for identification parades on open grounds, which are often the filthiest stretches of the neighborhood.

A forty-four-year-old Kashmiri man named Hamid, whose brother had disappeared, told me:

We sit for hours, in the position the soldiers order to. You cannot move; if you do, you get beaten. It is like an open prison. We might be made to sit on dirt and feces. I have been in crackdowns that lasted for days. Sometimes we would go without food, and sometimes the soldiers would allow some edibles. It is humiliating; we are treated like rats. The streets and fields where we play cricket become torture centers. My friend was killed in a crackdown. They told us to look down and then we heard shots.¹²

In the initial years the crackdowns would last for long periods—sometimes for two or three days or more. In recent years the armed forces have attempted to cordon the civilians and engage in encounters with militants, who are usually holed up in a house. Often, these homes are destroyed, and the militants are killed rather than arrested. During a crackdown, while the men are detained, the women are inside the home. Most feel vulnerable to be alone in dealing with the soldiers searching their premises, which is not without reason.

Kunan-Poshpora, the twin villages, became a brazen and painful example of what the soldiers are capable of. One night in 1991, while the men were detained, drunken soldiers committed mass rape of between thirty-one and a hundred women, who ranged in age from seven to seventy years, including a pregnant woman and a physically challenged girl (see

Batool et al. 2016). Human Rights Watch (1993b) has explicitly titled a report *Rape in Kashmir: A Crime of War*. This report documents how rape has been systematically deployed in Kashmir to repress and humiliate the population into subjugation. The siege-like conditions during a crackdown and the forced absence of men make it easier for the soldiers to sexually assault women, who are captives in their own homes.¹³ Sharifa told me that as a woman, she not only worries for the men but also agonizes over the behavior of the soldiers and feels unsafe even in her own home. She added: “Home is not a home anymore; it has no sanctity. The soldiers barge in with boots, they loot, molest. And outside it is the same.”¹⁴ Sharifa’s narrative outlines and prods at the very heart of the inversions and transmutations that have taken place in Kashmir. More important, it traces the powerlessness that threatens all genders in all spaces in Kashmir.

MEMORY IS RESISTANCE

Social routines and spaces transmute, where meanings are inverted and subverted. A wedding is tempered with funerary songs, and a funereal venue becomes a site of wedding imaginaries; the difference between public and private diffuses and collapses. A process of the incessant subversion of meaning is under way that not only signifies and challenges but also leads from and to the modes and spaces of alternate resistance created by people. Memory becomes an agency and resistance against the hegemonic discourse of the government. Thus the *commemoration* is alive but restrained. Even though both the combatants and noncombatants killed at the hand of the government forces are given the status of *shuhda* (martyrs), buried during massive funerals in designated graveyards, public events around commemorations are often difficult and risky. While subjugated knowledge reclaims memory, inversely it also traces how the social memory is confined in a way that cannot be valorized the same way in public—like the way the Indian government hails its own national heroes who fought against British rule. Yet people sustain memory by covert reiterations.

The process of countermemory becomes evident in ways of remembering and also of selective forgetting. These processes reveal how means of commemoration are created, how the disappeared are made visible or even invisible—what must not be seen or what the government does not want seen. In the event of a wedding, the archive and repertoire enmesh and transmit social and political knowledge. While subjugated knowledges are forms of experiencing and remembering, making some knowledge visible, they also become a condition for the possibility of making something invisible. The erasures being carried out in Kashmiri society under military occupation become a paradox: people remember to forget, lest they are penalized. In the events that are hidden from the eyes of the government, the memory oozes out, becoming a testament to the fact that the government cannot achieve the complete erasure of memory, and thus the complete annihilation of resistance is impossible.



i returned home
 to broken gutters
 spilling onto doorsteps,
 bullet casings,
 old bones
 she had kept the roses
 from the garden gutted by grenades,
 winter had razed the rest
 she never bid him goodbye,
 her eyes red from the teargas,
 in Kashmir
 lovers are suspected of seeking *azadi*

CONCLUSION

When I left Hableh's courtyard, she followed me to the door, walking slowly, holding on to the picket fence for support. She gave a final look toward me as I said goodbye, but instead of sending me off with the customary "Nyear Khodayas havala [Go with God]," she said: "Tcheti roozi waen diwaan; deyweh yemeh tawneh taleh gatchow Azaad [You too keep looking; pray for good that we are liberated from the scourge (of human rights violations)]." Hableh's injunction was not a simple wish for a continued search for her son, Rafiq, the forcibly disappeared pharmacist. She knew very well that my research was not an investigation into individual cases, and that the least of the results would be that I find clues about her son. The way she uses the word *azad* (liberated/free/independent) is in the spirit of how it used as a slogan for Azadi (independence from India), which is ubiquitous and a daily invocation inside Kashmir. Hableh's last words perform the dual task of praying for liberation from the human rights violations and the Indian military occupation. Her expression makes manifest the connection between the search for the disappeared, the constant pursuit of justice, and resistance. As Hableh said, this would alleviate the "scourge" (*tawan*) of human rights violations by the Indian military occupation for good.

In the ambit of political anthropology, this ethnography is recognition of the agency of everyday people like Hableh that fuels their daily lives. In turn, this agency fills the larger ocean of human survival and is often overlooked in the political histories of nations. This book uses anthropology's ability to speak about the people who inhabit those nations, and more important, those who endure the making and unmaking of those nations. The people under repression manifest their social and political expectations, hopes, desires, prayers, and fears in a variety of nuanced cultural ways. Hableh's injunction manifests a culture of resistance and activism that has evolved around the human rights violations affected by the

Indian military occupation to repress genuine political demands of Kashmiris. Of note is the fact that there has been a “considerable drop” in the cases of enforced disappearances; in 2016, for example, just three to four cases were recorded (Human Rights Report 2016).¹

By that token we could reductively assume that something has been resolved in Kashmir, or the human rights record of the Indian military occupation has improved. However, the human rights violations are occurring at an even faster pace. The killings (both combatants and noncombatants), encounters with militants, cordon-and-search operations, incarcerations, and instances of censorship are on the rise. Despite the major shift in the nature of Kashmiri resistance from arms to civil disobedience, especially between 2000 and 2016, the government has shown no change in its lethal response (Duschinski et al. 2018). Increasingly since 2008, the epitome of the punishments meted out by the government forces on the Kashmiri population is manifest in extreme maiming through the use of pellet guns, leading to what has been called the world’s first case of mass blinding.² Thus the government is replacing one technology of punishment with another, while sustaining the political status quo.

Today most international narratives around Kashmir propagated by India “paradigmatically begin by recounting the origins of the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan” (Robinson 2013: 33). Yet inside Kashmir, the lived reality is to invoke the long experience of Kashmiri resistance against *zulm* (tyranny) (Duschinski 2009; Evans 2002; Hassan 2010). Sham-sudin, a shopkeeper in the old Srinagar downtown, the historical hub of pitched battles with the government forces, expressed it: “For nearly 550 years Kashmiris have been oppressed. This time, the adversary is India, and the slogan of Azadi is loud and clear, but no one hears our words.”³ The stories of the APDP activists and other Kashmiris that enliven these pages reiterate that resistance has become an indefatigable part of Kashmir’s culture, but it does not exist in a vacuum. Kashmiris are careful to put the Tehreek in historical context so that, as one local journalist stated, it is not “reduced to what India varyingly portrays as

a domestic law-and-order issue stemming from unemployment, and youth disaffection, or a bilateral territorial issue with Pakistan, or a Pakistani proxy war, or religious terrorism.”⁴

Despite being sidelined by India, since 1989 the United Nations has taken cognizance of human rights violations in Kashmir, and in 2018 in a landmark event the OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) released a “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir.” The outgoing UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, stated in a news report: “The political dimensions of the dispute between India and Pakistan have long been centre-stage, but this is not a conflict frozen in time. It is a conflict that has robbed millions of their basic human rights, and continues to this day to inflict untold suffering.”⁵ The report documents the human rights violations occurring on both sides of the LoC, specifically focusing on Indian-held Kashmir with an emphasis on the implementation of a lasting solution by consulting the Kashmiri people. For Kashmiris, who ritualistically invoke the UN mandate, this has reinvigorated the international watchdogs’ historic stand on Kashmir and is viewed as the leading path to “restoring” the recognition for their right to self-determination in the twenty-first century. The right to self-determination is “reflected in the charter of United Nations recognized as common article one of the international covenants, accepted in the opinions of the International Court of Justice, and reflected in the theory and practice of international law” (Goodhart et al. 1995: iii–iv). Significantly, it is not the Kashmiris who reneged on the UN preconditions for self-determination, yet as this ethnography illustrates, they are the ones bearing the brunt of the shortcomings of the competing nuclear countries.

In addressing the concerns of feminist anthropology, this project traces a culturally nuanced mode of resistance and agency as has been done before in different contexts (Ahearn 2001; Abu-Lughod 1991, 2013; Fraser 1992; McNay 2003; Mahmood 2005; Osanloo 2008; Ahmed-Ghosh 2015). There have been efforts across disciplines to bring to light the “consistent gendered resistance” (Ghosh 2008: 4) in a South Asian context. This book contributes to the understanding, amplifying women’s voices as they

emerge and make themselves heard in conditions of political violence. The human rights movement such as the one pursued by the APDP activists has become crucial to gender dynamics and practices of politics in Kashmir, the significance of which can no longer be ignored. When Mogal Maas died, many local newspapers reported her passing. The stories were written from a sincere human-interest angle in which Mogal was cast as a stereotypical grieving mother.⁶

Although foregrounding Mogal's maternity was reverential, it eroded, if not erased, her political agency. Such a stereotypical portrayal is not unique to Kashmiri women; rather, it abounds in the images of the Afghani burkha-clad women or the Mater Dolorosa in the Global South. These narratives based on victimology obscure women's agency when their men are taken away. Yet under political violence "the culture and tradition undergo a series of transformations, where women begin drawing on social and political categories" (Peteet 1991: 99). In 2014, while I was writing this book, I penned the conclusion while Parveena Ahangar was at the University of Westminster in London, chairing a conference commemorating twenty-five years after China's Tiananmen Square tragedy. Parveena also addressed the British Parliament about the situation in Kashmir. As I was further revising the book in November 2017, Parveena and Parvez Imroz, her founding partner of the Association of the Parents of Disappeared Persons, became recipients of the Rafto Prize for Human Rights in Norway. The work of mourning that APDP pursues as politics (which some have simplistically relegated to just being "a woman's thing") emerged as an indisputable witness, an advocate for Kashmir's political tragedy and its political will, on a global stage. Kashmiris have bequeathed the sobriquet of the "Iron Lady of Kashmir" on Parveena. This harkens back to the explanation she had given me years ago about her transformation into *shisterr* (iron) in order to overcome the social odds and fight the consequences of military occupation.

The expressions of gendered agency in this regard appear more as possibilities than merely as challenges to relations of domination or only outright or confrontational subversion of norms, be they in the social or

political realm. The capacity for action is understood as that which is created and enabled by the historically and culturally specific relations of subordination (S. Mahmood 2005). Agency thus becomes conscious, goal-driven activities by women and the propensity to make choices between pathways of action (see Strathern 1996). Such an understanding of agency encompasses the strategic choices that women make to combat the contingencies of a protracted, low-intensity war that has disappeared their husbands and altered life as they knew it. The category of gender as an analytic draws attention to women's vulnerabilities concerning their bodies and sexuality as well as their political and social expectations under a chronic military occupation.

As part of feminist praxis, the theorizing of affective law traces the ignored lives of the APDP activists—the most unlikely forms of gendered subversions within a collective insurrection and how they are forms of resistance. Affective law as an analytic yields a nuanced exploration of resistance through women's experiences, even when they are seen as “politically ambiguous” (Peteet 1991: 128) or stereotypically passive or agency-less (Aretxaga 1997). Zooneh's hauntings around the door and waiting is a symptom of the affective law that shapes resistance as a form of counter-memory. The affective law becomes the genesis of subjugated knowledge—crucial to relations, practices, and politics, since gendered actions are socially and culturally mediated. Affective law illustrates how gendered processes exist as opposed to the stereotypically stable and passive gender roles attributed to women. It becomes reminiscent of what Michel Foucault (1990) has explained about resistance—that it flows in every direction within the social fabric, and not just one specific point follows rigid principles of subversion (Medina 2011: 10), which only involve a direct undermining of the power of an established institution.

The analysis of women's everyday affective politics of mourning underlines their struggles and how they inhabit their gendered identities within the social and political discourse through embodied practices and dispositions. Also made visible is how women adapt to political, social, and cultural situations. This provides the opportunity to explore how gendered

processes evolve in a patriarchal setup that has been deeply complicated and subjugated by the Indian military occupation and is vulnerable to direct forms of violence. The lives of Kashmiri women provide contrast to the experiences of Kashmiri men. The overarching Kashmiri patriarchy is the subaltern within the Indian masculine militaristic apparatus. Within that subalterity of Kashmiri men, Kashmiri women form another layer of “feminine” subalterns. What the work of the APDP reveals, and by implication what each woman activist represents, is a triumph of subalterity within subalterity. The activists struggle against the challenges of gendered social marginalization and the overarching political subjugation of a society that as a whole is engaged in forms of resistance to the Indian military occupation which have become an indispensable part of Kashmiri culture.

GLOSSARY

Note : The Kashmiri language includes many Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and Urdu terms. This glossary focuses on the words rather than the etymology and therefore does not include derivation in the definitions.

AFSPA Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, implemented in 1991 in six districts of Jammu and Kashmir

ahlaidgi-pasand separatist

Angrez Sahib honorific title for Englishman

asal zanan *asal* means “good” and *zanan* means “woman”; the opposite is *kharaab zanan* (bad woman)

askari tehreek armed movement

awami sunwai people’s court

azaan call to prayer

azadi independence/liberation /freedom

azmayish a test

badtameezei rudeness; uncouthness

begunah innocent; without sin

beni sister

bey-raham merciless

bhoot specters; ghosts

burkha garment worn to cover the body, with or without face veil, worn by observant Muslim women

buth face

CASO cordon-and-search operation, also called a crackdown, conducted by the Indian government forces, reintroduced in 2017

daeshh prayer knot, often tied on shrine structures as a mark of supplications

damm choking

dedi/ded traditional term for a grandmother; wise matriarchal figure
dehshat terror

dharna a sit-in

didi elder sister

Dogra/s a warlord clan from the Jammu province, which bought the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846 and ruled the state as an independent kingdom under British paramountcy until 1947

enforced disappearances disappearance of Kashmiris affected in custody of the government forces after abductions and arrests

falah-aam o khaas for the common good

fana fiAllah those who have annihilated the self into Allah

faqir a person divinely ordained who has renounced the world and is immersed in spirituality and healing

fidayeen suicide bombers

FIR first information report—a complaint launched with the police after a crime

gaddar traitors

gaeb gamit people who have been disappeared by the Indian government forces

Godill “goodwill” pronounced colloquially; name for military humanitarianism

gunahgaar sinner/guilty

Habbeh Khotoon a medieval-era poet-queen, wife of Yusuf Shah Chak, the last indigenous king of Kashmir

half-widow coined by the Kashmiri media, the term describes wives left behind after their husbands have been forcibly disappeared by government forces

hamsheera sister (see *beni*)

haq right

haq-e-khodiradiyat self-determination under UN auspices (also see *rai shumari*)

haq-i-khoday rightful possessor or a right divinely ordained, used to refer to one's husband in Kashmiri tradition

Hizbul Mujahidin (HM) an armed militant group that favors accession of the Kashmir Valley to Pakistan, co-founded by a teacher named Mohammad Ahsan Dar

Holy Quran the holy book for Muslims

Hurriyet Conference a conglomerate of twenty-eight resistance outfits founded in 1991

Hurriyet-wael those who are a part of Hurriyet Conference (see *Hurriyet Conference*)

ibadat worship

iftaar breaking of fast at sunset

ikhwanee(s) a militia of dreaded surrendered or renegade militants (also small-time thugs and criminals) subcontracted by the government to fight the insurgency (also called *nab-yid*)

ilhaaq accession (in this case, the treaty with India)

izzat honor

jaloos a procession (see *muzahira*)

Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) one of the oldest political organizations that seeks an independent Kashmir; called for an indefinite ceasefire in 1994

jiji refers to “aunt”; APDP's chairperson, Parveena Ahangar, is fondly referred to by this name

kakad/kagzaat paperwork; documents (also see *parchi*)

kanger a peculiar Kashmiri hot coal brazier used to keep warm during winter

kani-jung stone battles; street fighting

keffiyeh name given to the Palestinian scarf or its South Asian versions
kursi chair

kutneh/suthan trousers resembling jodhpurs or tights

Lala Ded medieval-era female mystic-poet heralded as a spiritual mother by both Hindu and Muslim Kashmiri

Line of Control (LoC) United Nations–drawn line between Azad Jammu and the Kashmir Valley in 1948; initially called “the ceasefire line”

majaz lawful; competent **majboori** desperation

makar describes a person who is a hypocrite; someone who has a covert agenda and uses sly tactics to gain selfish outcomes

makarel a type of repertoire or playacting to attain selfish gains without appearing confrontational or adversarial to the perceived opponent (see *makar*)

Maqbooza Kashmir Occupied Kashmir (both Pakistan and India call the territory under each others’ control “occupied”)

masjid place of worship where Muslims congregate to offer mandatory and special prayers

Mazar-e-Shuhada Martyrs Graveyard

metch/motth in Kashmiri tradition, women (*metch*) / men (*motth*) seen as outside the normal social conventions; often perceived as mysticseers who renounce society and take to wandering among people or in the wilderness; also, used casually to describe people who have lost mental balance

milton colloquial for “militant” (see *mujahid*)

mouji traditional term for “mother”

mujahid strivers; popular name for militants who fight the Indian rule

mukhbir an informant who passes information to the counterinsurgency apparatus

muzahira a demonstration (see *jaloos*)

nun-chai green tea with salt and milk

ogarwadi/atankwadi terrorist

pagal medically insane; crazy, in a lighthearted vein

parchi a written document; or a short note/referral/recommendation, often written on an informal piece of paper

pheran knee-length, loose winter gowns worn to keep warm

pir a person with lineage claiming to be a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him); also means “master” or “spiritual guide”

pooch taach to question; also a euphemism for detainment, primarily for “questioning” by government forces

rai-shumari referendum, plebiscite, or self-determination (also see *haq-e-khodiradiyat*)

sadqa-e-jairiyah a term for continuous alms or charity, which can include an activity that benefits the community or individuals after the person is dead

saethi comrades

Salamalaikum (short for As-salam-u-alaikum) “May peace be upon you”—Islamic greeting

sang baaz stone-warriors; factions of civilians, mostly youth, who fight the government troops with stones

sanglat stone

saya shadow; specter

sehat health

shaheed/shuhda martyrs

shalwar kameez name of a dress that includes trousers and tunic

shisterr iron

sifarish recommendation; good word

siyasat politics

siyasat-daan politician

sonderkommandos category of prisoners that Primo Levi (1988) mentions in the context of those in Auschwitz who got special jobs and seemed better off

Special Operations Group (SOG) government-sponsored militia group raised in 1994 and subcontracted to fight the insurgency in Kashmir

Special Task Force (STG) militia group raised in 1995 to fight the insurgency (also see *Special Operations Group*)

Sunnah an Arabic term that describes a body of social, traditional, and legal knowledge about the life practices of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muslims consider Sunnah as model guidance for everyday life.

taherr traditional offering of turmeric rice with fried onions; sometimes mixed with meat or chicken

tamasha fun; spectacle

tareekh day/date; also used for the date of a hearing in a court case **taweez** a talisman

Tehreek popular and overarching name of the resistance movement against the Indian rule

tehreeki name given to loyalists of the resistance movement (combatant and noncombatant)

UNMOGIP United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan; in 1949 succeeding UNCIP, UNMOGIP supervises the ceasefire between India and Pakistan along the Line of Control

village defense committees (VDCs) government-armed civilian-vigilante groups, especially in Jammu province, formed to fight the militants

wutarr feverishness; discomfort

zyadti forced/forcibly; also a euphemism indicating anything from simple harassment to molestation and rape

NOTES

Introduction

1K. L. Kalla, ed., *The Literary Heritage of Kashmir* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1985).

2Unless there is a need to be specific about nomenclature, throughout this book I use the term “government forces” to indicate military, paramilitary, irregular militia, and police—all of whom are active in counterinsurgency policies of the Indian authorities. I refer to this region as Kashmir, the Kashmir Valley, or Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as well as the Princely State of J&K, which indicates the entire territory of the former kingdom before 1947. I also use Indian-occupied Kashmir (IOK), which many recent scholars (N. Kaul 2011; Robinson 2013; Bhan 2013, 2014; Junaid 2013a; I. Malik 2015; Verma 2016; Zia 2016; Duschinski et al. 2018; Duschinski and Ghosh 2017; Osuri 2017; Faheem 2018; Fazili 2018; Kanjwal 2018a; D. Misri forthcoming; T. Ali et al. forthcoming) have deployed to illustrate the status of the region of Kashmir that lies bifurcated between India and Pakistan and is awaiting a final resolution under UN auspices. I also use Indian-administered Kashmir (IAK)—the formal name used by the United Nations, which lists Kashmir as an international dispute to be solved by a plebiscite. The word “administered” depicts a temporary tenure and hold on the regions under Indian and Pakistani control.

The nuances in the nomenclature used for the Kashmir region remain largely unexplored, and over the past seventy years different terms have been used interchangeably and unquestioningly. A 2018 OHCHR report notes: “There is no specific decision of a UN

intergovernmental organ that clarifies which terminology should be used to describe the region of Kashmir. The Secretary-General's reports and letters have used the following terms: Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir, State of Jammu and Kashmir, Indian administered side of the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir, and Pakistan Administered Kashmir. In a statement of 17 August 2016, the Secretary-General referred to Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir.” While the varied nomenclature obfuscates the political history, it is a reflection of the multilayered-ness of the Kashmir issue and its chronically unresolved status in a deeply complicated postcolonial polity of India and Pakistan. The use of a particular nomenclature reflects political loyalties or aspirations of the user. However, it also reflects the deep ignorance that has been perpetuated primarily by the Indian government, first by downgrading Kashmir from an international dispute to a bilateral one and finally by calling it a domestic matter.

- 3Currently, Parveena Ahangar and Parvez Imroz lead two separate groups of the APDP. In November 2017, together they received the Rafto Prize for Human Rights in Bergen, Norway. I did my fieldwork with activists from both APDP groups. In this ethnography I identify the association of activists with either group when required.
- 4Within the APDP, there is only one activist who is a Sikh, and her son has been forcibly disappeared.
- 5Parveena Ahangar, interview with the author, Tengehpur, Srinagar, July 2, 2009.
- 6In this ethnography, all names of research partners (except a few eminent public figures who asked for their names to be retained) are pseudonyms to protect their privacy.
- 7For a list of scholars, see note 2 in this chapter.
- 8Cocks (2012) provides an understanding of foundational violence by differentiating it from Galtung's (1975, 1978, 1980, 1994) paradigms of direct, structural, and cultural violence.
- 9In recent years notable scholars and writers, both Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri, have tasked themselves to produce historiographies of the

Kashmiri identity in the context of marginalization under British and Dogra rule (Rai 2004); the changing contours of Kashmiri identity over time (Zutshi 2003); and Kashmiri subjectivity within political and social systems (Bashir 2016); and also use literary history to analyze Kashmir as a place and people (Kabir 2009).

- 10 The magazine was founded and edited by Professor Hamidi Kashmiri, a well-known Urdu poet-critic, and his partner, Professor Misra Maryam, who served as a coeditor.

Chapter 1. The Politics of Mourning

- 1 Founded in 1994 by Parveena Ahangar and Parvez Imroz, the APDP is a net- work of parents, relatives, and other concerned people dedicated to searching for disappeared Kashmiri men. Currently both founders head individual APDP groups.
- 2 Zooneh, interview with the author, 2009, Srinagar.
- 3 This has been a common problem even in the case of arrests, custodial killings, and other forms of violence by the government forces.
- 4 Zooneh, interview with the author, October 2011, Khankah Moula Shrine, Srinagar.
- 5 Azi, interview with the author, summer 2009, Kupwoar.
- 6 Subsequent publications carry this parable (e.g., www.kafka-online.info/before-the-law.html). It also appeared in Kafka's *The Trial* but under a different name.
- 7 Descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him; most families with the Syed surname belong to the clerical class and are known for their knowledge of religion, and some might practice the profession of faith healing.
- 8 Zooneh, October 2011, Khankah Moula Shrine, Srinagar.
- 9 Also see the glossary terms *metch/motth*.
- 10 Zooneh, May 2012, Khankah Moula Shrine, Srinagar.
- 11 Usually the *taweez* are inscribed with verses from the Holy Quran and other Islamic prayers and numerals.

- 12In my conversations with other Kashmiris, I heard that the man–animal conflict was on the rise because paddy land near forests was being converted into fruit orchards.
- 13Lali, participant observation and interview with the author, July 2011, Srinagar.
- 14Lali, interview with the author, August 2011, Srinagar.
- 15Lali, interview with the author, October 2011, Khankah Moula Shrine, Srinagar.
- 16These documentaries include *Chandav* (Search), directed and produced by Naqshab Afra (2000); and Iffat Fatima’s *Where Have You Hidden My New Moon Crescent?* (2009) and *Khoon Diy Baarav* (Blood leaves its trail, 2015). In 2004, I cowrote episodes titled “Habba’s Letter” based on the struggle of APDP activists with Debo Kotun for *Courtyard* , a docudrama series for KPFK 90.7 FM Pacifica Radio for Los Angeles.

Chapter 2. The Killable Kashmiri and Weaponized Democracy

- 1Interviews and participant observation with Shabir and his wife, Taja, took place between 2009 and 2013. Due to safety concerns, I am using a fictional name (“Azadpur”) for the village where Shabir lives.
- 2Shabir, interview with the author, August 2011, Azadpur.
- 3See Martha Nussbaum’s (2007) discussion on Muslims in India, where she compares them to the 1950s African Americans in the U.S. South.
- 4For further discussion on Muslims as the perceived Other in the Hindu nationalist imaginary, see Pandey 1992, 1994, and 1999.
- 5See Ahmad 2009 for further discussion on Muslims, Islam, and India.
- 6See “A Good Vote in the Angry Valley,” *Economist*, December 30 . www.economist.com/node/12868164. This editorial matter-of-factly states: “As is their habit, Indian troops crushed the protests brutally, killing some 40 people.”
- 7Parvez Imroz, interview with the author, May 26, 2009, Srinagar.
- 8Some of the key scholars of the Kashmir region from across disciplines whose detailed analysis has informed this section are A. G. Noorani

(1964 and 2011), Alastair Lamb (1991), Victoria Schofield (1996, 2004), Sumantra Bose (1998, 2004, 2007), Christopher Snedden (2013), Mridu Rai (2004, 2018), Chitralkha Zutshi (2003), Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2009), Cabeiri Debergh Robinson (2013), Haley Duschinski (2010, 2014), Mona Bhan (2013), Mohammad Junaid (2013a, 2013b), Goldie Osuri (2017), Duschinski and Ghosh (2017), and Duschinski et al. (2018).

- 9Pakistan calls them “irregulars” or *lashkar* (the Arabic word for “army”). Andrew Whitehead (2008) found that some members of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a militant group currently fighting in Kashmir, trace their lineage to the militia fighters of 1947. The foreign guerrilla fighters in Kashmir today are called Mehman Mujahidin (Guest Strivers). Also see Amin 2000. The NWFP was a province under British India. In 2010, Pakistan renamed the region Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- 10In 1948, after the first full-scale war broke out between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, the UN brokered a 485-mile-long cease-fire line that split the region of the Princely State of Kashmir. One-third of the territory, including the far northern and western areas along with Gilgit-Baltistan, ended as a semiautonomous entity administered by Pakistan, known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The remaining two-thirds of the region, including the valley of Kashmir and the provinces of Jammu and Ladakh, came under Indian control.
- 11In East Ladakh, Aksai Chin is a 38,000-square-kilometer strip, of which 5,180 square kilometers are under China’s control.
- 12UNCIP (1948–50) was an investigative, mediating body tasked with resolving the dispute over Kashmir.
- 13For detailed analysis of the political consequences of this assembly, see Rai 2018.
- 14The political party Plebiscite Front called for a plebiscite. Founded in 1955, it dissolved in 1975. See Qasim 1992.
- 15The MUF coalesced as a political party in 1987 that wanted to raise the political dispute of Kashmir under the UN mandate. Despite popular support, the MUF lost after massive and concerted vote rigging.

- 16Name withheld, interview with the author, Maisuma, July 13, 2012; Zahir U Din, interview with the author, Amira Kadal, August 1, 2011.
- 17This is the same election in which the army was coercing Masooda Parveen's husband to stand as a candidate (see chapter 6).
- 18The word "jihad" in English is used to refer to religious warfare. Yet within the Islamic religious literature and practice, the word has varied meanings, which can refer to struggle in spiritual or material realms. A "Mujahid" is a striver or struggler, who undertakes jihad in the service of God by seeking spiritual elevation, doing good works, and resisting evil speech and forms of corruption. For more discussion on this, see Mamdani 2002 and Robinson 2013.
- 19Kashmiris debate the use of *hartal* as a means of protest because it is economically damaging, yet it persists as a mode of protest in which every Kashmiri can take part.

Chapter 3. Spectacular Protest

- 1The APDP under Parvez Imroz's patronage hold their protests at Sher-i-Kashmir park.
- 2The ideal of *begunah* that Parveena invokes is interesting for understanding how exonerative and punishable categories are made and reinforced under state repression. For detailed discussion, see chapter 5.
- 3Documentaries such as *Chandav* (Search), directed and produced by Naqshab Afra (2000) and Iffat Fatima's *Where Have You Hidden My New Moon Crescent?* (2009) and *Khoon Diy Baarav* (Blood leaves its trail, 2015) capture the elegiacally mourning aspect of APDP activism.
- 4Rehat, interview with the author, Tschatchebal, Srinagar, June 12, 2012.
- 5Parveena, interview with the author and participant observation, August 10, 2011.
- 6I use "performance" and "performativity" interchangeably and do not engage with the nuanced differences between them like Judith Butler (1988, 1990, 2004b) does. Moreover, "performance" in the context of

APDP activism can be used to understand “things that are in-process, existing, and changing over-time” (Phelan and Lane 1998: 365).

7The ideals of gentleness, compassion, and obedience in her son Phamba are understood as being “girl-like.”

8*Jiji* is a term of endearment; Phamba called Parveena this, meaning “aunty” instead of “mother”—calling one’s own mother by varied terms is not an uncommon practice in Kashmir.

9Also see Aretxaga 1997; Das 2007.

10Lala Arifa was a fourteenth-century revolutionary mystic-poetess born into a Hindu home, who is widely heralded as a saint. Both Muslim and Pandit-Hindu Kashmiri communities see Lala Arifa as a maternal icon and attach the epithet of *Ded* (mother) to her name.

11“Performative accomplishment” is a phrase that Butler (1988: 520) uses to indicate gendered acts that construct an identity that actors come to believe and perform.

12See Wadley 2008.

13CO refers to the commanding officer of the local army camp. Pronounced “C-O,” it is often suffixed with - *sir* or - *saeb* —a term of respect in Kashmiri, especially in the presence of the army.

14Male doctors rarely practice as gynecologists in Kashmir.

15She reminded me of Goffman’s (1959) theorization of human behavior, which he draws from a dramaturgical setting. Sadaf’s home is the “backstage” that is supposedly free from external surveillance; Goffman suggests the stage is where we perform (i.e., the public).

16In some cases, younger women can include sisters or other relations of the disappeared person.

17See Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 122.

18The editorial gaze refers to “the whole institutional process by which some portion of the photographer’s gaze is chosen for use and emphasis” (Lutz and Collins 1993: 195).

19Since these observations in 2014, many activists might have passed the age of fifty.

²⁰See Das 1995, 2007; and Peteet 1991 on the agency of women in the Indian and Palestinian contexts, respectively.

Chapter 4. Gendered Resistance in Kashmir

¹See Kanth 2018.

²Rehat, interview with the author, August 7, 2009, Tengehpur.

³In the case of the killing of a noncombatant or a combatant, the response is an immediate reaction where people—all genders, young and old—flock to attend the funeral, which may be more aptly termed a funeral-protest.

⁴Zooneh, interview with the author, October 7, 2011, Srinagar.

⁵Ibid.

⁶See the website of the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), <https://afadsecretariat.wordpress.com/apdp/>.

⁷Varmul is also called Baramulla.

⁸Sadaf, interview with the author, November 2011, Varmul.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 5. Militarizing Humanitarianism and Life in the Gray Zone

¹Military humanitarianism has been on the rise globally since 1992, when the UN outlined the new military doctrine on peacekeeping (Slim and Penrose 1994). Weiss and Campbell (1991) have used the term to describe using the military in service of humanitarianism to alleviate suffering caused by human-made or natural disasters. The term has been explored in context of the increasing role of the military as “armed first responders” (Hoffman 2017).

²This analysis is based on personal interviews between 2008 and 2014.

³Interviews for this chapter were conducted between 2010 and 2015.

⁴See “Prime Ministers Reconstruction Programme (Model Village),” <http://drdk.nic.in/PMRP.pdf>.

⁵See “Guns and Ghee” 2016 and India Opines n.d.

- 6BRIC refers to Brazil, Russia, India, and China, which are considered to be countries at an advanced economic stage.
- 7Ruhi is a member of the APDP group chaired by Parvez Imroz.
- 8PB, interview with the author, Lal Chowk, July 12, 2011.
- 9*Sunnah* refers to the body of social and legal knowledge based on the conduct and bearing of the Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him.

Chapter 6. Archiving and Embodying the Disappeared

- 1Hableh, interview with the author, December 2012, Singhpur.
- 2For detailed discussion on files and how they exist in the bureaucratic maze in South Asia, see Gupta 2012 and Hull 2012.
- 3Gul Bano, interview with the author, September 2010, Kupwar.
- 4Parveena, interview with the author, April 2012, Haiderpur.
- 5“Repertoire” in this case does not include classic activities, like theater or dance, but a performance of the everyday, a way of living, where the disappeared has been assimilated into life, embodied as a haunting, a knock about to come, a reverse pregnancy, or the archival impulse.
- 6Hameeda, interview with the author, November 2012, Eid Gah Safa Kadal, Srinagar.
- 7The office of Parvez Imroz, patron of the other APDP, is stacked with case files and habeas corpus petitions, which form part of the recordkeeping and documentation that the parent organization, Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, undertakes.
- 8See Brothman 2004.
- 9Zareefa, interview with the author, January 2012, Shopiyan.
- 10Jabbar, interview with the author, December 2011, Islamabad.
- 11This is an Islamic declaration of faith, often recited by the dying or those around the deathbed.
- 12For further details on *motth*, see chapter 3 as well as the glossary.
- 13This refers to the site where all the important administrative offices, the “civil secretariat,” is located. All top bureaucrats, the chief minister, and other ministers have their offices in this highly securitized zone.

- 14Even though the UN directive is that anyone may bring an alleged violation of human rights to their attention, the directive also requires that all domestic remedies of addressing the case should first be utilized. In that context, expectations of appealing to international justice bodies remains a distant dream. “The Right to Remedy for Enforced Disappearances in India,” IHRLC Working Paper Series No. 1, Human Rights Law Clinic International. (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 2014), <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Working-Paper-1-India-Right-to-a-Remedy-151027.pdf>.
- 15Masooda Parveen, interview with the author, February 2012, Pampar.
- 16Saffron is an expensive spice grown in the Pampar region in southern Kashmir, where Mohidin and Masooda lived in an upper-middle-class household.
- 17See “Supreme Court of India Judgment Regarding the Case of Ghulam Mohiuddin Regoo” (2007), www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/doc/ps-islam-0317.
- 18Fateh, conversation with the author, October 2011, Poloview Road.
- 19Safa and Marwa are the names of two hills in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, between which Muslims ritually walk during the Hajj to commemorate Prophet Ibrahim’s wife Hajjar’s search for water for her young infant, Ismail.
- 20Excerpt from the SHRC judgment on Naseeb’s disappearance case, Office of the Secretary (the file number cannot be divulged for safety’s sake).

Chapter 7. The Convergence of Grief and Joy

- 1In Kashmiri he said, “Wetchthow welcome, sakh welcome, ath chu seeth ya goel ya maar ya muft khaar.”
- 2Parveena, interview with the author, October 18, 2012, Bandpur.
- 3The samovar is a copper kettle fitted inside with a tube in which to put coals, used for brewing and serving traditional pink salty tea called *nun-*

chai .

4 *Jan* is a term of endearment suffixed to names, equivalent to “love” or “sweetheart” in English.

5 *Laleh* is a suffix used to indicate respect.

6 This perception has massively shifted since this interview was conducted because the local police has been increasingly militarized to become part of the counterinsurgency (see Fazili 2018).

7 “One who holds hand/helps” is an epithet for the medieval-era Muslim scholar and sage Syed Abdul Qadir Jeelani (may Allah be pleased with him) of Baghdad, who is revered by Kashmiri Muslims.

8 *Hamido* is the name of someone else’s son, whom *Azi* names for commemoration.

9 *Zool* means “to light up” houses especially during wedding celebrations.

10 This is an expression of pain and regret.

11 *Na-mahram* is a category of people in Islamic Shariah among whom sexual relations are not taboo. For others to intermingle with *na-mahram* is not allowed without chaperones, or in some cases not allowed at all.

12 Interview with the author, June 12, 2010, Gagribal. This man, who was a teenager in the early 1990s, reminisced about a crackdown in the town of Dalgate during which four boys, all noncombatants, were killed. See the Human Rights Watch (1993a: 52) report on the Dalgate killings.

13 See Inzamam 2018.

14 Sharifa, interview with the author, August 2012, Barbarshah.

Conclusion

1 See references: this source includes two links, one for a 2016 report and another for a 2015 report, page 7.

2 Waheed 2018.

3 Shamsudin, personal interview with the author, August 2014, Srinagar.

4 Mushtaq Ahmed, personal interview with the author, August 12, 2016, Srinagar.

⁵Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein stated in the first-ever UN human rights report on Kashmir calling for international inquiry into multiple violations, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23198%20>.

⁶See Jaleel 2009; Kaunsar 2009; and Altaf Qadri 2010.

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